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ABSTRACT

This document presents a review of the current consumer relations activites of the National Library Service (NLS) for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress, and an overall plan to improve NLS receipt of user suggestions, comments, opinions, or complaints through libraries which form the nationwide NLS distribution system. An overview of current user input activities in matrix format is provided, as well as a review of NLS responsibilities in meeting the special needs of its patrons. A plan is presented for a consumer relations function at various levels--NLS cooperating regional and subregional libraries, and other NLS network agencies--with a discussion of staffing, training, and utilization of user input in policy formulation. A set of specific consumer relations activities for network libraries is proposed, based on library readership size and relative resource level. Examples are given for the design of reader surveys, the development of formal or informal consumer advisory committees, and the provision of staff training to increase sensitivity to patron input. A system of logging and tracking procedures is also proposed to assure proper flow of user information within the NLS/network system. The report concludes with a final set of 12 recommendations to NLS. (Author/ESR)

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Prepared for:

National Library Service for the
Blind and Physically Handicapped
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.

Contract No. LC-2492

FINAL REPORT

The Development of a Consumer Input Program for the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS/BPH) and Network Libraries

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October, 1982

The study was conducted and this report was prepared under a contract with the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress. Organizations undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to state their findings and express their judgements freely. Therefore points of view and opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent the official position of the Library of Congress. Copies of this report should be requested directly from the Library of Congress rather than the contractor.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document presents a review of the consumer relations activities of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress. It also presents an overall plan for the coordinated conduct of that function by NLS and cooperating libraries nationwide through which the books it circulates are distributed; and suggested consumer relations activities, plans and procedures for these agencies that will improve their sensitivity to and awareness of consumer perceptions on matters relating to the service. It will offer a plan for a system to collect and share this reader feedback for system-wide policy-making purposes.

Consumer advisory meetings, reader surveys, routine contact with readers in the course of book ordering, and internal and inter-agency communications are the primary means by which NLS/network consumer input is received and shared. The resulting input mechanism is in compliance with the two primary sets of standards for responsibility for relations with consumers which NLS observes. The first of these is that set by the American Library Association specifically for the operations of this unique library agency; the second, that adopted voluntarily from an Executive Order signed by President Carter in 1979 (which does not aply to the Congressional Branch of the U.S. Government), calling for the establishment, and specifying the functions of, consumer relations offices in Executive Branch agencies.

Each NLS/network agency type is presented with a plan for a consumer relations function, based in format upon the above-mentioned Executive Order. Staffing, training, input processing review, and utilization in policy-making activities are addressed.

In acknowledgement of the wide variety of organizational and resource contexts of many of the cooperating regional libraries, a set of proposed consumer relations activities for network libraries is then presented, based on size of readership and relative resource level. This section is designed to allow individual libraries to adapt the overall plan to their situations, so that a standardized, although flexible, overall pattern of service can be developed.

A specific presentation of three primary types of consumer relations activities is presented, with examples, to assist librarians in the design of reader surveys, development of formal or informal consumer advisory committees, and in training their staff in sensitivity to patron input.

This "how-to" section is then followed by a discussion of the means to collect input using the common activities that can emerge from adoption of the plans proposed, to assure proper flow of consumer input information within the NLS/network system. Thus, the twin goals of improved services to individual readers at local libraries, and overall improvement of system operations, are addressed.

A concluding chapter is presented, reviewing the various increasingly detailed components of the plans presented in the report, and drawing from them a list of recommendations which InterAmerica makes to NLS as its client:

1. The Consumer Relations Section should be supported and its consumer relations functions expanded, and integration between its consumer relations functions and those of all other sections at NLS should be increased.

2. Correspondence with network libraries necessitated by reader input, often called for in addition to direct responses to the reader, should be jointly prepared by the network Consultant responsible for that library and the Consumer Relations Section.

3. The Consumer Relations Section should conduct regular administrative meetings attended by heads of all sections at NLS on consumer related issues.

4. All sections at NLS should routinely route copies of reader input received, and section responses, to the Consumer Relations Section for tabulation. Briefings on the aggregate types of input received will be given at the consumer relations meetings.

5. The Head of the Consumer Relations Section should meet individually with the the heads of all other sections at NLS regularly or as needed to review consumer relations issues and procedures.

6. The network Consultant function should be expanded to include routine communication with the Consumer Relations Section of all consumer-related matters discussed between consultants and their assigned libraries on an ongoing basis, as part of their designated field monitoring functions. These reviews should cover the consumer relations items from the library checklist used on site visits.

7. NLS should adopt an additional method of communicating consumer-related matters on a rapid, ad hoc basis to consumer organizations as well as the network via a series of occasional notices which could be called "Consumer Bulletins." These could be sent to consumer organizations, network agencies, and key figures in the consumer

community for the purpose of broad, rapid notification of these publics on matters of timely import concerning the NLS' patrons.

8. The Consumer Relations Section should publish periodic handbooks for use by network agencies on various aspects of consumer relations activities implementation, and/or consumer issues discussion and training activities.

9. Regional and Subregional libraries should provide periodic, structured training and discussion sessions for staff who interact regularly with readers, to assure optimum use of opportunities for obtaining consumer input.

10. Regional and Subregional libraries should maintain logs of consumer input received, according to broad categories standard across the network. These logs should be compiled regularly and transmitted to NLS for periodic tabulation, so that a regular, network-wide system for monitoring consumer input can be available to policy-makers.

11. Network libraries should periodically conduct reader surveys, ranging from "mini-surveys" of readers calling in to place book orders to large scale, mailout surveys on a variety of topics, conducted according to accepted statistical techniques.

12. Network libraries should regularly obtain input from consumers through meetings, either of standing consumer advisory committees, with rotating memberships and bylaws, or through "open forum" meetings, announced well in advance and preferably held at various locations around the library"s service area.

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The project under which this report was developed is indebted to many individuals. Mr. F. Kurt Cylke, Director of the National Library Service, and Mrs. Mary Levering, Chief of the Network Division, were the originators of the concept of a Consumer Relations Section and a study to review functions in this area. Mr. Richard Evensen, Project Coordinator at NLS, Project Officer on this contract, and Ms. Judith Dixon, Head of the Consumer Relations Section, provided ongoing guidance, review, and monitoring to the project. Special thanks go to Dr. Harry Pachon, Vice President of the Division of Research, Evaluation and Management Services, InterAmerica, under which this project was performed. The staff of the Consumer Education Resource Network, a national consumer information and dissemination project operated by InterAmerica, also provided substantial support to the project. All errors and omissions remain the responsibility of the author.

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Chapter I - Introduction

This report was prepared under Contract No. LC-2492 with the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, between September 1981 and September 1982. Its purpose was, formally, "to Develop a Consumer Input Program for the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS/BPH) and Network Libraries."

The NLS/BPH program celebrated its 50th year of operation in 1981, a span during which an increasingly beneficial program of books and magazines converted to recorded media and braille has been offerred, so that those unable to read standard print would not be deprived of the value of the printed word in everyday life.

In 1981, a Consumer Relations Section began operations at NLS, with duties, among others, to:

> "maintain active liaison with individual users and consumer groups; conduct continuing user surveys, ... (and) ... provide information and reference services to readers."
>
> (Library of Congress, Regulation No. 219-8)

In September, 1981, to perform several functions relevant to the commencement of operations in this Section, the project which resulted in this report was initiated by InterAmerica Research Associates.

The National Library Service selects and produces books in volume for circulation nationwide to any eligible reader, and prepares periodic listings of books and magazines available. The actual circulation of the books, which are in the form of recorded disc and cassette, and braille sheets, is carried out by a network of cooperating libraries covering every state in the country. Eligible citizens living abroad are served as well.

The complexity of this system, and its dependency on the voluntary cooperation of state-level and other agencies nationwide, calls for clear information monitoring and transmission systems for book circulation, equipment allocation, distribution of new titles, and so forth across the many participating units of the "network." One aspect of this communication that has not been formalized to date is the feedback of consumers -- patrons of the library system's materials and services -- as to suggestions, comments, opinions, complaints, and general two-way communications with those the system serves.

Each library in the 160-library field network system has a great deal of contact with its own patrons, centering around the routine process of ordering and returning books. Most libraries, in addition, send periodic newsletters to their readers, to inform them of upcoming publications, activities of related groups, and otherwise to establish a sense of community. However, no coordinated system has ever existed for soliciting reader feedback from the overall readership, on a regular basis, so that a "barometer" of reader perceptions can be available at the highest levels of decision-making within the parent agency.

This report is designed to serve as a reference document for new NLS and network library staff. It contains a series of recommended guidelines of performance for libraries to consider in assuring that they are sensitive enough to the perceptions of their readers for their own planning purposes and are, as well, able to accurately pass along to NLS profiles of the interests of their readers across numerous policy interest areas.

Chapter II presents an overview of the types of these activities which occur at present. They are presented in a matrix format, to underscore the need for NLS/network-wide compatibility for efficient information flow. Chapter III presents a review of NLS responsibilities for providing this consumer feedback mechanism. It finds that NLS has declared a commitment thereto, at a time when many Executive Branch agencies were only just establishing offices for this purpose, and is at present merely further strengthening a function it has offered throughout its existence -- the meeting of the special needs of its patrons in order to enable them to benefit from documents which sighted persons take for granted.

Chapter IV draws on the Executive Order promulgated by President Carter in 1979, in developing an overall Consumer Relations Plan for each of the several levels of agencies which make up the NLS/network system. It will aid in their planning of activities, in a way that leads to a cooperative, multi-agency system, increasing the efficiency of consumer relations information flow network-wide.

Chapter V takes the issue of application further, depending on the size of the library, as measured in combined readership (which bears directly on staff size), and the resource situation of each individual library. Suggested activities are presented for each size and type of library, on three levels of resource outlay. The lower level represents a program which should be the minimal level provided, even given a reduction in resources. The middle is that which is preferably in existence at the present. The upper represents a level of consumer relations activities which libraries should ideally be able to offer.

Chapter VI reviews several common methods of obtaining consumer input -- advisory group meetings, surveys, newsletters, and improved staff sensitivity training. While no one blueprint can apply to all libraries, the specific components suggested under each heading are relevant to most library settings. A sample Reader Survey Questionnaire, and suggested Consumer Advisory Committee Bylaws (developed by NLS), are appended for illustrative purposes.

Chapter VII concludes the discussion of collection of consumer input by examining the different ways in which such input is handled within and across various levels of the NLS/network library system. It is noted that while various formal systems exist within NLS itself as an agency, the distances between libraries and the lack of regular methods for tracking consumer attitude information in other than an anecdotal or reflective manner in inter-library communication may lead to possible misrepresentation of true consumer input, once the large number of readers who are not particularly vocal in their views are borne in mind. A system is suggested for regularly keeping a broad-based log of comments in letters and calls from consumers, by topic, so that such a record could be maintained, in standardized form, across the network, and some national sense of reader feedback thus obtained. Present Regional Conferences and voluminous telephone and written communication among network agencies accomplish this to an extent, in the course of other business, but such a system for this purpose alone could prove to be a valuable aid in the decision-making process of the NLS/network system.

Chapter VIII concludes the report, indicating that it represents a newly focused emphasis on a subject area that has always been foremost in the NLS/network system -- appropriate service to readers in need.

A series of recommendations are made, based on the reviews of NLS/network activities conducted in the course of this project, for the continuation and improvement of the consumer relations function within the NLS/network system.

Chapter II - A Study of Consumer Input Methods at NLS and Network Libraries

I. INTRODUCTION

The diversity of ways in which input is received from users by NLS and the network agencies was a major reason for the decision to conduct one comprehensive study of the issue of handling of consumer relations in the NLS system. This chapter, a delineation of those methods, was developed as the first component of this study. Subsequent chapters present an analysis of NLS' formal responsibilities for consumer relations, followed by a proposal for a comprehensive consumer relations plan for use by the Library andnetwork agencies , developed for three different possible levels of resource commitment. A handbook on consumer input activities which can be used by network agencies, including a sample questionnaire, is provided as well.

The purpose of this review of current NLS consumer input methods was, according to the contract for the study, to "Review, categorize and evaluate all existing methods for obtaining and/or utilizing data solicited by or received from the NLS network." This review covers only those activities in operation during the study (September 1981 - September 1982). A matrix approach is used in addressing this task, so as to comprehensively review all possible relevant activities. This approach provides a fresh perspective on consumer relations at NLS and in the network. A hierarchy of organizational levels is identified for purposes of discussing consumer relations and input with regard to each; within each level a series of categories of consumer input mechanisms will be identified. The resulting matrix covers all input types at all levels. Subsequent to this structural analysis, assessment of these methods is discussed.

Specification of Organizational Levels

The first step in development of the structural matrix is the identification of specific levels into which the various component organizations and functions are grouped. Six are identified, based on a combination of locus and function; they are as follows:

- NLS - Central Administration
- NLS - Direct Circulation
- Multistate Centers
- Regional libraries (and Regional Library Conferences)
- Subregional libraries
- Other Network Agencies - Machine Lending Agencies, Deposit/Demonstration Collections

This listing varies from the formal chart of the NLS/network agencies in two distinct ways -- the specification of NLS direct circulation versus administrative functions, and the identification of the Regional Conferences as entities which should be considered in reviewing consumer input mechanisms. These two additional listings permit consideration of additional, otherwise possibly hidden consumer relations activities. The NLS Consumer Relations Section in the Network Division, established in 1981, has functions which fall into both Central Administration and Direct Circulation categories, for example. Most other sections fall clearly into one category or the other.

The type, nature and processing of consumer input received by NLS Central Administration operations versus Direct Circulation activities can differ greatly. Input addressed to those sections performing direct circulation is more likely to be concerned with those services specifically; input received by other NLS sections may cover a wide range of topics and generally comes about subsequent to initial local-level inquiries. This clearly has consequences for the sensitivity with which such input is handled.

Regional Conferences represent a forum for the Regional libraries to express common interests and concerns, both at biannual meetings and in interim communications. They are thus a means for identification of consumer issues experienced by the member libraries. Concerns regarding the recent implementation of various automation systems throughout the network, for example, where libraries closed down for a time in order to complete the work required, furnish one example of this.

Each of these six levels will be described and discussed in more detail below.

Consumer relations functions and activities which may occur at each of these organizational levels must be categorized; a listing of such activities is offered in the next section.

Types of Consumer Relations Activities

Public agency interest in consumer relations is of relatively recent emergence, but many types of activities precede it as logical ways of obtaining information on the wishes of the clients of organizations. These include, for example, establishment of citizen advisory committees, and surveys. For purposes of this study, a list of current NLS consumer relations activities identified by NLS was furnished to potential contractors, in the RFP. This list is as follows:

- Ad Hoc Committees
- NLS Surveys
- Unsolicited Correspondence
- Unsolicited Telephone Calls
- Exhibits
- NLS Attendance at Consumer Meetings
- Network Data

This list was designed to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. Current activities which have relevance for consumer relations but are not so acknowledged, i.e., activities of sections of NLS other that those directly involved in the above listed activities, are not reflected. Activities occurring outside of NLS directly, e.g., within the network, also are not included. Many consumer relations functions are often not amenable to such brief listing. Accordingly, a logical structure of consumer relations activities will be presented so that all possible activities may be incorporated into it.

The method for codifying types of consumer relations activities consists of a range of activity types along a continuum from Informal, External activities at one pole to Formal, Internal activities at the other. A category identified as "Intramural" is included to cover information flow within the network. These labels will be discussed in more detail below.

This typology is based on a review of NLS and network activities. An effort to obtain literature on comparative studies of government consumer relations programs, so as to review how activities have been categorized for examination elsewhere among public agencies, has been unsuccessful. This typology is therefore proposed as appropriate to NLS without documentation, but based on a cross-sectional review of NLS and network operations. Further, it is re-emphasized that the very novelty of the typology is deliberate, so as to permit emergence of new ways of considering activities relating to consumer relations at NLS.

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Definitions of categories should be understood to be non-rigid. It is of greater importance to understand the range of activity types that is being addressed. The question of whether irregular consumer advisory meetings should be considered formal or informal, for example, could be argued at length; it is more important for this analysis to note that some consumer activities are more informal than others. Similarly, the category titles "External" and "Internal" are indicative rather than restrictive.

The category labeled "Intramural" bears further discussion. This term is used because, while NLS uses the terms "NLS/network," "NLS and network agencies," and "network libraries" to variously refer to its relationship to some or all of the organizations through which its services are provided, the processes involved in the maintenance of that relationship are not explicitly self-evident from an understanding of the organizational structure involved. While in sports this term is used to refer to competitions within rather than between institutions, in health research the term is used to refer to research conducted by grantees, in the sense that they are outside the institution but within the immediate research community. They are, most importantly, included in the peer review process by which the direction of further research is selected. It is this characteristic, wherein a collegial, interactive, and voluntary relationship is maintained between the home organization and specific other organizations "outside its walls" that is nevertheless central to the ongoing mission of the home organization, that is the basis for use of this term on an analogous basis at NLS. It is important that these complex characteristics be kept in mind in discussing the flow of information within what this paper will from time to time term the "NLS/network system."

The following chart presents the proposed spectrum; several current activities are shown for purposes of illustration.

Figure 1

A TYPOLOGY OF CONSUMER INPUT ACTIVITIES

Informal/ External	Formal/ External	Intramural	Informal/ Internal	Formal/ Internal
Unsolicited telephone and mail input; comments to reader advisors; irregular meetings	Contact with consumer organizations; regular committee meetings; reader surveys	Annual Network survey; regional conferences; national NLS/network conferences	Staff	Administrative Council section heads head, consumer relations

Some of the illustrative activities listed above are not in the RFP list of NLS consumer relations activities. Use of a comprehensive logical model to assess total activities is thus supported.

Consumer Relations Activities Matrix

The organizational levels listing and the activities typology can now be combined into a Consumer Relations Activities Matrix, presented on the next page. The "cells" (possible entries) in this matrix can then be studied individually. The following discussions of current activities will refer to the cell numbers in this matrix in order to clarify the relationships among the various input types and organizational levels.

Figure 2

CONSUMER RELATIONS ACTIVITY MATRIX

Type / Level	Informal/ External	Formal/ External	Intra-mural	Informal/ Internal	Formal/ Internal
NLS - Central Administration	(1)	(7)	(13)	(19)	(25)
NLS - Direct Circulation	(2)	(8)	(14)	(20)	(26)
Multistate Centers	(3)	(9)	(15)	(21)	(27)
Regional Libraries/Confs	(4)	(10)	(16)	(22)	(28)
Subregional Libraries	(5)	(11)	(17)	(23)	(29)
Other Network Agencies	(6)	(12)	(18)	(24)	(30)

II. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT METHODS FOR CONSUMER INPUT

The discussions in this section present the consumer relations activities which occur presently across the various organizational levels of the NLS system, grouped by activity category as defined earlier. This method of organization is being used to provide a new perspective in the analysis of these activities, so as to reveal all current acknowledged activities and as well those which may be implicitly understood but not clearly recognized to be consumer relations activities.

Informal/External (Cells #1-6)

This category refers to nonstructured activities, initiated by and large by users of the library service. Unsolicited letters and telephone calls to network libraries or to NLS, comments made to reader advisors, and irregular consumer input meetings can be grouped under this category. Much of this input is routine in nature, as in the case of queries on where to go for service, and particular questions about books, machines, the ordering process, and so forth. Such items are routinely referred to and processed by the appropriate office, whether received in written form, by phone, or in person.

Regional and Subregional libraries rely heavily on informal external input for consumer relations activities (cells #4 and 5). According to 1980 and 1979 Annual Network Surveys, 25, or 48 percent, of 52 responding Regional libraries hold irregular meetings as a consumer input activity. Of the 55 Subregional libraries (about half) responding, 35, or 64 percent, indicated irregular meetings were held in 1979-1980. For both Regional and Subregional libraries, this method of consumer input -- irregular meetings -- ranked over all others.

Reader advisors receive input from users, as part of their work in assisting readers in making selections and ordering from the collection; however, this method of consumer input is not generally tabulated. In one recent case, a Regional librarian asked the reader advisors to poll readers they were assisting concerning a new publication; response was deemed very useful. Thus, this interaction has potential for both formal and informal deliberate consumer relations contacts.

As concerns informal external input at NLS (cells #1 and 2), the preponderant means is the large volume of unsolicited telephone and mail input received. Occasional drop-in visits by readers occur from time to time as well and are a further source of consumer input. Many sections are assigned responsibility for handling responses to such contributions and queries.

While these inquiries are processed and suggestions taken under advisement, the only recently established Consumer Relations Section is the only vehicle for overall periodic tabulation of types of consumer input received, and action taken, by section. The previous lack of such a system is for the most part due to: 1) the wide range of input issues received; 2) the lack prior to 1981 of any explicit consumer relations function at NLS; and, 3) the sheer volume of such input. All of this input must be routinely handled along with the other duties of the various sections. Formal review provides an invaluable aid to managers in monitoring trends and emerging patterns in field operations and user interests. Systems for routing requests and suggestions are in place; they are reviewed and adjusted as the need arises. The Consumer Relations Section has been assigned the function of coordinating responses requiring input from several sections. Figure 3 on the following page briefly notes the functions of NLS units regarding consumer relations.

Figure 3: Consumer Input Processing and Consumer Relations Functions of NLS Sections

Division/Section	Function	Forms of Input	Referrals
Office of the Director (OD)	Ultimately responsible for nature and handling of responses to input.	Phone, Mail, Person	Final Approval
Administrative Section	Routes incoming calls, mail; assists drop-in visitors.	Phone, Mail, Person	Receipt/routing of all NLS input
Publications/Media Section	Conducts public education, including materials and PSAs.	Phone, Mail, Person	Determined by Specificity of inquiry
Facilities/Materials Handling	Receives input accompanying equipment, music, international materials.	Mail	Production Control, Music, Network Services, Consumer Relations
Network Division (ND) Office of the Chief	Operates Network consultant program, coordinates all Network/Consumer relations.	Phone, Mail, Person, Field	Direct response, ND routing, coordinates ND policy statements with OD/MDD
Braille Codes	Assists volunteers in finding local braille instruction.	Phone, Mail	Consumer Relations, Network Services
Consumer Relations	Liaison with users and groups, ensures input, coordination of multiple-inquiry response; international services.	Phone, Mail, Person, Field	Multi-query, coordination, routing procedures review
Music	Circulates music materials directly to patrons and answers all music international interlibrary loan requirements and all correspondence and reference inquiries about music.	Phone, Mail, Person	Facilities/Materials Handling, Procedures Control, Quality Assurance, Network Services, Consumer Relations
Network Services	MSC operations and flow, equipment control, consultant services, interlibrary loan, network production assistance, bibliographies, circulation and redistribution.	Phone, Mail, Person, Field	Refers regularly to and from all NLS Sections
Reference	Most written queries, especially regarding NLS enrollment/services; reference services for NLS, network staff including blind and physically handicapped.	Phone, Mail, Person	Refers regularly to and from all NLS Sections
Materials Development Division (MDD) Office of the Chief	Coordinates evaluation and demonstration of current/planned equipment.	Phone, Mail, Person, Field	Direct response, MDD routing, coordinate MDD policy statements with OD/ND
Collection Development	Long-term collection development plan, annual acquisitions, coordinates with committee, foreign language program, children program.	Phone, Mail, Person, Field	Publications/Media, Consumer Relations, Music, Bibliographic and Production Control, others as needed
Bibliographic Control	Utility of fiction subject classifications.	Mail	Collection Development, Consumer Relations
Production Control	Timeliness and quantity in production of new materials; narration, media problem identification.	Phone, Mail, Person, Field	Collection Development, Bibliographic Control, Quality Assurance, Facilities/Materials Handling, Consumer Relations, Network Services, others as needed
Quality Assurance	Monitoring of Quality Assurance maintenance and problem resolution.	Phone, Mail, Person, Field	Production Control, Engineering, Consumer Relations, Network Services, Facilities/Materials Handling, others as needed
Engineering	Demonstrations, plans for new equipment/materials.	Phone, Mail, Person	Production Control, Quality Assurance, Consumer Relations, Network Services.

The MSCs (cell #3) interact almost entirely with NLS and network organizations, rather than directly with consumers. Only hand-copied braille is circulated directly from MSCs. They are not intended points of consumer input, but route any which is received to the appropriate network agency.

Other network agencies (machine lending agencies and deposit or demonstration collections) receive some unsolicited consumer input (cell #6); such input is generated from the interactions these units have with the users they are serving. However, no data exists as to whether they hold even irregular meetings with their users. Finally, CMLS, as do MSCs, receives some input but routes it elsewhere for response.

Formal/External (Cells #7-12)

This category covers such activities as surveys, regular committee meetings, and contact with organizations of blind and physically handicapped consumers. As with the prior category, there is no evidence of such input activities on the part of either those agencies grouped in this listing as "other network agencies" (cell #12), or by Multistate Centers (cell #9). A thorough survey of such agencies, not possible under the present work scope, may nevertheless reveal that some such input mechanisms do exist.

Regional and Subregional libraries conduct surveys and maintain standing input committees. Twenty-two, or 42 percent, of 52 reporting Regionals had regular committee meetings in the last two years; the same number have conducted reader surveys. Ten, or 18 percent, of 55 reporting Subregionals had regular meetings and 17, or 31 percent, have conducted surveys.

In addition to these structured activities, eighteen, or 25 percent of reporting Regionals and 4, or 7 percent of reporting Subregionals, indicated that they meet with organizations of the blind and physically handicapped. This contact with the several national organizations' local chapters is an important and necessary part of consumer relations, different though it is from working with individuals or locally-organized committees. These groups can facilitate local discussion of larger fundamental issues of national policy, thereby involving consumers and the network agencies in current policy issues.

The NLS itself utilizes several consumer relations activities which fall under the Formal/External category. Most of these concern central administrative functions (cell #7): the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Collection-Building Activities, composed of network representatives and readers, which meets annually to oversee the general policies and specific plans for titles acquisitions activities; the Combination Machine Review Committee, a combined limited-field-test group and input panel on this new machine; the study evaluating cassette braille; the recent national surveys which NLS has conducted of non-users and users; and the ongoing participation of NLS in the annual conferences of numerous interest groups including organizations representing the library's users (American Council of the Blind, National Federation of the Blind, Blind Veteran's Association, National Association of the Physically Handicapped).

Several of the recent surveys conducted by NLS should be classified under its Direct Circulation function (cell #8). These include general readership surveys, such as the annotation survey, the magazine survey, and occasional surveys on specific matters included as items in the Library's regular periodicals such as Talking Book Topics. More specific surveys concerning the Library's several direct circulation activities include a poll of overseas subscribers as to interest in an audio version of the quarterly newsletter serving that group; and a survey of its users conducted by the Music Section.

Another consumer relations activity of NLS is the monthly, three-day orientation sessions which can be attended by any interested party, whether user, new NLS or network employee, contractor, or those with other basis for interest in the NLS/network's operations.

The surveys mentioned above are the primary mechanism for formal external input by NLS Direct Circulation units. Participation at consumer organization conferences does not apply to the international reader servicing function of the Consumer Relations Section (although of course that section in its NLS Central Administrative functions will be attending numerous consumer group conferences); nor to the Music Section (which does attend conferences of music educators). Finally, these sections have no standing consumer advisory committee or meet on a regular basis with users of their particular services.

Intramural (Cells #13-18)

The term intramural is being used in this analysis to refer to communication between the network, including its various types of agencies, and the NLS. This category, distinct from external or internal, emphasizes the great amount of, need for, and dependence on communications that occur entirely among those involved in the NLS/network system about consumer issues, in addition to direct consumer input from the outside. While most intramural communication is administrative in nature, a portion of it cannot be considered "routine" since the very concept and function of the Library and its operational arms is so specialized, and its policy issues and management procedures are far from static. Many such matters relate directly to consumer relations concerns. Cases in point include issues of funding limits vs. outreach recommendations; changes in the population to be served, with major procedural and political ramifications for network agencies and user groups; issues of right of access;

and the many issues that arise locally concerning the role of the program within the state government (whichever agency may administer it), the coordination of the program's services with other state-funded services; and the range of consumer input and interest locally.

These examples serve to demonstrate both the range and the interrelatedness of the issues which arise in the course of network operations of direct relevance to consumer relations and consumer input. Two mechanisms exist for identifying, hearing and addressing this range of issues: conferences, held biannually of all network agencies with NLS, and, in alternate years, among the network agencies in each of the four NLS regions alone; and, visits to the network agencies, especially the Regional libraries, by the NLS team of network Consultants. The conferences serve as major forums for the discussion of emergent issues, both via annual meetings and as mechanisms for the ongoing monitoring and resolution of operational or policy-related problems. Interim communication between Regional librarians occurs on a substantial scale, and provides a direct vehicle for program improvement.

The network Consultant function, operated by the Network Division of the NLS using one full-time and six part-time (partial assignment) NLS staff, constitutes the primary internal network management assessment function. The consultants each are assigned to one or more of the NLS Regions of the country, and regularly visit each Regional library in their Region every two to three years. (In addition, each Multistate Center is visited every six months by two alternating consultants.) These visits serve a monitoring function, as NLS, in providing materials -- recordings and machines -- but not on-site staff, must assure itself that these materials are being properly stored, used, and cared for. These visits are also the vehicle for communicating anything of import involved in the operation of the program. Many concerns are exchanged; consultants utilize a checklist to cover all areas of operations. Consumer feedback conveyed in these visits can be found in the checklists and site visit reports, and may be conveyed to other consultants and NLS administrators in regular consultant meetings. Regional library concerns can lead to development (or rethinking) of NLS positions on procedural matters; often case-by-case interpretations are called for. Thus, for example, while reaction to new NLS administrative measures is obtained in this manner, NLS also learns of locally-expressed consumer interest on issues that may be of more than local importance. As such, the value and central position of these consultant activities to the Intramural, and overall consumer relations and consumer input activities of the NLS and its network, cannot be overemphasized. The Consumer Relations Section should be brought into the review process, in order to facilitate periodic review of this function; specifically the consumer-related aspects of the consultant teams' intramural communications.

The Intramural consumer input activity category cuts across all organizational levels: Annual conferences involve both NLS functions, Multistate Centers, Regional and Subregional libraries, and other network agencies. (Multistate Centers have no explicit consumer relations function although they do receive consumer input.) The network Consultant program addresses five of the six levels directly as it "connects" the NLS Central Administration function with the MSCs and the Regional (and through them the Subregionals and other network agencies).

Informal/Internal (Cells #19-24)

Visually and physically handicapped NLS employees constitute a valuable internal resource, individually and as a group, for the Library's use in determining program planning as well as in obtaining specific feedback on technical issues. Their presence within the NLS is an important day-to-day vehicle by which the NLS obtains consumer input on central administration and direct circulation matters (cells #19 and 20), via presence at many formal and informal meetings, and participation in ongoing processes of reviewing of draft materials and responding to requests. In the course of circulating internal drafts of upcoming articles for NLS periodicals, several visually handicapped section heads have the opportunity to review the content and perspective both as sample consumers and in their formal capacities; feedback from each of the two roles is then passed on in the review process. In addition, meetings of all visually handicapped staff are held from time to time to discuss print/braille calendars, audio book production, and other matters where their unique input is called for.

The vision status of employees in network libraries is reported in the Annual Network Survey (cells #22 and 23). There were 160 visually and physically handicapped employees at 72 network libraries reported in the 1980 Annual Network Survey, in widely varying numbers and job classifications. Thus, this form of input is available in network libraries as well as at NLS.

Formal/Internal (Cells #25-30)

The last category of consumer input activity is that which is both internal to the organization and structured in nature. This category is presented to comprise the opposite pole on the continuum from the occasional unsolicited letter or telephone call from a user -- the input referred to here originates inside the agency, and is by design conveyed via an organizational structure created to elicit expert input on policy decisions involving the operations and direction of the agency.

The National Library Service utilizes a management device commonly observed in large organizations for routine internal monitoring of agency progress and policies, a standing senior staff review panel. In the NLS this group is called the Administrative Council. This body is comprised of the Director, the Assistant Director, the Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs of the two major Divisions which comprise the agency, and the Project Coordinator, from the Office of the Director. All of these individuals are sighted except the last. By virtue of his position on this body, then, this person provides true consumer input at the very center of the organizational decision-making process. This configuration is not emphasized or even necessarily the primary objective of interest. This individual's position as coordinator of multiple internal and external special projects under way constantly makes it important that he be a member to this body; the consumer input role is a valuable adjunct benefit to the agency.

NLS employs other persons in administrative capacities who are visually handicapped; these individuals also provide sample consumer input in the course of their duties, participating in the administrative process in two distinct roles. In one instance, this has substantial value for the consumer relations function of the Library -- the Head of the Consumer Relations Section is blind, and can thus represent interests of users more effectively in internal matters, and represents the Library's focus very effectively to others in the course of her work.

III. AN ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT NLS/NETWORK CONSUMER INPUT METHODS

Assessment must be grounded in some measure -- assessment with regard to what? In the consumer relations field, a general measure could be stated as ability to increase the awareness of consumers of the services and/or products of the sponsor and their ability to make better choices. In some cases, including NLS, this specifically includes making consumers more aware of the means by which they may have input to the sponsor organization, above and beyond the interaction involved in using its services. This measure, increased awareness, is a measurable impact indicator, as should underlie any comparative assessment.

Where impact data is lacking for one group but is available for others, assessment could be based on comparison of efforts to obtain impact (in this case, NLS' consumer relations activities) with similar efforts having measured impact by others.

Assessment is sometimes based on performance relative to requirements, or standards, under the implicit assumption that performance at the level of the standard will cause the degree of impact desired in various settings covered by the standard. Left implicit here is whether data to justify the identified standard's true impact exists. Such standards can, of course, be dictated, with comparable impact assumed given comparable efforts, whether true impact data is used as a basis or not.

Given that the present arena focuses on the consumer, true assessment of program impact would have to be based on measured impact indicators.

Therefore, the following question for assessment can be derived:

> To what extent do methods used at NLS increase the awareness of the consumer of the services and/or products of the NLS, and specifically increase the consumer's knowledge of means of providing input to NLS,
>
> a. Compared with each other.
>
> b. Compared individually or as a group with methods used by other governmental agencies OR by other organizations of any type providing similar services to the same population.
>
> c. Compared to the situation if some or all of them were not available.

Problems exist in attempting to obtain such data for comparative analysis. First, data does not exist on comparative assessment by users of NLS consumer relations activities. The "User Survey" obtained general degree of satisfaction data, not ratings of the various consumer relations activities offered by NLS and network agencies. Secondly, a review of the literature and contacts with knowledgeable federal officials and consumer organization groups have revealed no known comparative assessment of governmental consumer relations activities which could serve as a baseline for comparing NLS' activities with those of other agencies.* No such comparative assessment of consumer relations activities of organizations providing services to the blind and physically handicapped population has been found, and no basis exists for selecting one agency over another for one-to-one comparison with NLS' program.

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*The White House Consumer Affairs Council indicates that guidelines for such programs have been issued, and a descriptive report of programs established under E.O. 12160 has been prepared, but no formal evaluation of these programs in operation has been conducted to date, despite Section 1-505 of the Order, which requires periodic evaluation. Hence, no assessment of relative impact is yet possible.

Thirdly, no comparative data seems to be available on the NLS user awareness of NLS services and/or products, again specifically including methods for providing input to NLS, as to differences in awareness in the absence or presence of one or more of the consumer relations activities the NLS/network system now provides. A comparison study using two similar libraries, in which one provides an activity such as regular meetings of a consumer input committee and the other does not could reveal differences in degree of consumer awareness, but such studies would suffer from the need for control of many intervening factors, and in fact have not been found. This method has, however, been attempted in general in the consumer field. Phillips and Calder (1979) detail numerous examples of consumer studies in which the conclusions cannot be supported by the data due to failure to control for (or even often to address) outside factors.

Even studies involving before-and-after tests of the same population regarding product selection preferences given introduction of some form of consumer information not previously available suffered from so many other factors involved in preference determination that they were classed as "weak" designs by the authors. In a follow-up paper presenting stronger designs (1980), they indicate that it would be necessary to perform a study using multiple before-and-after tests of both control and experimental groups -- on the order of 40 different surveys -- before the most valid results could be obtained. Although their focus is detection of change in consumer behavior given commencement of a change in labeling to improve consumer protection, under strength of law, their work does bear sufficient analogy to the information needs of NLS to be considered seriously. Bloom and Ford (1979) consider work in the field of consumer education, more proximate to NLS interests than is assessment of consumer protection legislation impact, but they too note serious methodological problems in work to date given the nature of the subject.

The foregoing discussion assumes that relatively rigorous evaluation is under consideration; the fact that no appropriate such method or example is available is unfortunate in the rapidly changing consumer relations field. A more practical, experiential perspective shows that a good consumer input and consumer relations program should be multifaceted, have both formal and informal input mechanisms, and provide for recognizable responsiveness to input received. Comparison of the activities of NLS with the five principal requirements noted in Executive Order 12160, which required establishment of consumer programs in executive branch agencies, to be comprised of consumer affairs staff, consumer participation mechanisms, informational materials, internal education and training, and complaint-handling mechanisms -- reveals considerable coverage in all areas at NLS. "Ranking" of its current consumer relations activities against those of other agencies given the lack of bases for comparison is, however, inappropriate; it should be clear from the number and variety of activities and methods discussed in this chapter that NLS operates a very diversified and responsive input program.

In the absence of more formal, specific research on these subjects, the NLS can utilize data already in its possession -- internal, ongoing information on consumer preferences as manifest in consultant site visit reports, Collection Building Activities Advisory Committee input, and user attitude surveys by the network libraries. These sources, although in many cases not currently tabulated for statistical purposes on consumer-related topics, serve as an excellent "barometer" for monitoring consumer interest areas and NLS responsiveness.

Assessment of the degree to which these methods accomplish their purposes as well as they should requires some assessment of what the objectives in fact are regarding this input, in the eyes of both the agency and the consumers. The agency's responsibilities will be explored in the next chapter in this report.

The consumers' position as to the adequacy of current consumer input, as well as the adequacy of the mechanisms put in place to facilitate that input, can only be approximated from the findings of the recent "User Survey" conducted for NLS. Ninety-two percent of respondents to that survey rated the library service they obtained from the NLS program to be good or excellent; two-thirds of these were in the excellent category. However, based on survey results showing that librarians identified different categories of books as being needed in the system than did users, the recommendation was made for a structured mechanism for regular, ongoing consumer input to the libraries, to facilitate reconciliation of this ordering problem, and presumeably to accommodate other forms of consumer input as may from time to time occur.

The small number of suggestions for improvements -- new topics, easier machines, and the like -- suggest that there is a role for consumer input in addition to specific reader selection and suggestions mechanisms. Libraries which have installed toll-free hotlines have experienced greater input than expected, followed by a new, higher level of overall user satisfaction than existed before. This method, although not studied in the User Survey, may be a simple, low-cost approach to the problem cited in the

User Survey. The common-sense recognition of the need for user feedback, the NLS' traditional sensitivity to the expressed needs of its users, the User Survey results, and the variety of mechanisms cited in this paper all combine to support the preliminary conclusions that in general current input methods are adequate for the user.

The matrix used to present simplified depiction of the types and organizational locations of the various consumer relations and consumer input activities in the NLS system in this study reveals that they are concentrated in the external area, and involve mainly the NLS -- Central Administration function, the Regional libraries, and the Subregional libraries; a sizable amount of consumer-related activity occurs in other settings, however.

Given NLS' unique service population and the lack of measures of "good" government agency consumer input programs owing to a lack of comparative evaluations, it is inappropriate to attempt to evaluate NLS against other agencies as regards present consumer relations activities. Unfortunately, intern comparative evaluation is similarly impeded by a lack of comparative data; this study has documented present activities but cannot critique them against one another except in the most arbitrary way, absent impact measures. The matrix approach used in this chapter has provided a basis for review of these activities. Since they now exist, it can be assumed that prior decisions have been made that their value, as against continuing to operate without them, justified their establishment, and no contrary information has emerged in the interim. As NLS continuously receives feedback from the field on its operations and activities, outside critique of these activities on less than a large-scale survey or comparative basis adds little in the way of new knowledge. Greater quantification of this feedback in the future is the most practical approach to improvement of decision-making power as to the utility of these activities to NLS.

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Chapter III - A Study of NLS Responsbilities to Consumers and for Consumer Input

I. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter described the many types of consumer relations activities and methods for soliciting consumer input that the NLS/network system currently uses. This chapter will review responsibilities in this area and then discuss the relationship of the activities observed to the responsibilities identified.

The RFP for this study defined the work of this task in three separate, similar but slightly varying ways:

> "Products to be delivered: 2. Analysis of NLS responsibilities in relation to the general federal requirements, NLS authorizing legislation, and ALA Standards." (p. 21)

> "Objectives: B. Review and evaluate NLS responsibility for consumer input according to the general federal and specific NLS authorizing legislation and the ALA Standards." (p. 19)

> "Scope of Contract: b. To analyze NLS responsibility to consumers reflected in the general federal obligation to consumers as well as in the NLS authorizing legislation and embodied in the ALA Standards of Service for the Library of Congress Network of Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped; Executive Order 12160 (Sept. 1979) states that government consumer programs must be responsive to the needs of consumers and requires that their voice be heard and taken into account by agency decision makers." (p. 17)

Given these slight variations, InterAmerica proposes the following synthesized statement as its interpretation of this task:

> "Analyze, by reviewing and evaluating, NLS responsibilities to consumers and for obtaining consumer input, based on federal consumer program guidelines, NLS authorizing legislation, and the ALA Standards."

II. EVOLUTION OF CONSUMER RELATIONS AT NLS

Since its inception in 1931, the National Library Service has, as a circulating library, had extensive contact with its patrons. "Consumer relations" (interaction with the consumer other than by sales or utilization of services) has recently become of interest in many other settings as a specific, directed activity as it has long been at NLS. It refers, in American society today, to means by which input from actual or potential users can be received as to quality control, preferences, complaints, and other topics across a wide variety of concerns.

Such mechanisms are argueably present in the form of the presence of those who are end providers of a service or product, but in a complex society the feedback link from that point in the distribution chain back to the producer is not always clear or strong. Interest has been building in seeing that this link is explicitly established and maintained in many areas in and outside commerce. In the last ten years, interest in consumer protection and consumer education has grown rapidly in all sectors. Private industry recognizes consumer relations as more than a simple extension of market research, in fact a marketing tool, both through public image and through information obtained. In the federal government, this interest was reflected in the creation over the past decade of numerous agencies with protective roles -- Environmental Protection Agency, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Libraries, while often government agencies, have, however, always known of the importance of user feedback given their circulation function. NLS has attended to this concern for its full fifty-year history.

In order to make all agencies more open to input from users, Executive Order No. 12160, appended to this chapter, was signed by President Carter in 1979. It established a Consumer Affairs Council in the White House, comprised of representatives of all Executive Branch agencies, and also required establishment of consumer relations units in all Executive Branch agencies.

While such Orders are not binding on the Legislative Branch of the U.S. Government, they can be utilized nevertheless for guidance where objectives are shared. In the case of NLS, interest in a focus on consumer relations long pre-dated 1979, the year during which both this Order and the ALA Standards of Service for the Library of Congress Network of Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, were released. Since then, NLS senior administrative staff have arranged for both the establishment of a Consumer Relations Section, and the funding of the contract under which this report was prepared. The arrangements included internal reorganization, and decision to seek guidance from the objectives of the above-mentioned Executive Order.

During the same period, a decision was made to fund a separate study to assess NLS and Network operations with regard to the newly released ALA Standards, which cover consumer relations. As that study was still in progress at the time this chapter was drafted, InterAmerica here only notes the standards involved and refers the reader to the other study's findings.

At NLS, little clear external responsibility exists regarding consumer relations at the moment, but internal consideration of two major external measures, combined with other internal actions, create the terms of NLS responsibility to consumers and for obtaining consumer input.

III. NLS CONSUMER-RELATED RESPONSIBILITIES

Notwithstanding the above less-than-direct interrelationships between the several sources of mandate and direction concerning consumer-related responsibilities and NLS, this section will review the terms of each of these measures.

Executive Order 12160: Providing for Enhancement and Coordination of Federal Consumer Programs

While Executive Orders are not applicable to NLS, this document is being used as an adjunct tool in developing consumer relations functions coordination at NLS. Its five specific programmatic requirements are: 1) that there be consumer affairs personnel authorized to participate in the development of agency policy (NLS' Consumer Relations Section); 2) that there be procedures for consumer participation in the development of agency policy, including provisions for consumer input in decision-making, and forums (NLS' and network libraries' consumer advisory groups); 3) that materials be developed for consumers on the agency's services, responsibilities, and consumer participation procedures (NLS' new reader materials and informational periodicals); 4) that agencies educate their staff about this Order and the agency's plans on it (NLS Consumer Relations Section function); and, 5) that agencies systematically log in, investigate, and respond to consumer complaints, integrating analysis of these complaints into policy development (NLS' "charge letters" response process).

NLS clearly possesses those characteristics the Order was designed to foster.

Standards of Service for the Library of Congress Network of Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

The Standards prepared by the American Library Association, which affect all areas of NLS/network operations, are divided into four sections: Administration, Resource Development, Services to Users, and Public Education and Information. Most of the standards relating to consumer relations are found in the third and fourth sections, 4.3 and 4.4, but several fall earlier:

> 4.1.1.4: User Advisory Committees - Each Regional Library shall have ...
>
> 4.1.3.5: Affirmative Action - Every effort shall be made to employ blind and other handicapped persons ...
>
> 4.1.4: Volunteers - Tasks may include delivering and demonstrating machines to new users; furnishing transportation to users ...
>
> 4.1.5: Physical Facilities - All buildings shall be accessible to handicapped individuals ...
>
> 4.2.2.2: (Materials) Selection policies shall reflect the reading priorities of users ...
>
> 4.2.2.3: LC/NLS shall support an active collection development and evaluation committee ... (to) include ... users ...
>
> 4.2.8.3: Network librarians should have ready access to titles reproduced in special media ... to enable staff to give reader advisory service ...

The varied nature of these points, spread as they are among administrative, and materials and facilities management sections of these Standards, shows the degree to which user orientation pervades the operations of the network.

The third section of the Standards, 4.3 Services to Users, contains items totally directed toward user interaction; the first subsection states responsibilities to users:

4.3.1 Responsibility to Users

(1) Users shall have convenient access to reading materials to meet educational, informational, recreational, vocational, and self-development needs through the subregional or regional library which assumes primary responsibility for library service to eligible persons in a specified geographic area.

(2) Users shall have telephone access to the library either through a toll-free line or unlimited acceptance of collect calls. At hours when the library is closed, telephone access should be provided through a recording device. The library shall respond within 1 work day when the user has requested a return call.

(3) Users should be encouraged to visit the library. Hours of service should be scheduled to accommodate their needs. Network libraries should be convenient to reach and use. The subject of physical accessibility is covered in 4.1.5.

(4) Users shall be informed of service policies and procedures and be notified promptly of any major changes that will affect them.

(5) Circulation records and other records identifying the names of library users shall be confidential.

Other major elements, including the closely related fourth section, are as follows:

4.3.1.1: Communication with Users
4.3.2: Circulation of Equipment and Materials
4.3.2.1: Registration
4.3.2.2: Circulation
4.3.3: Materials and Information
4.3.4: Referral for Service
4.3.5: Referral for Production of Requested Materials
4.3.6: Reader Advisory Service
4.3.6.1: Annotated Bibliographies
4.3.6.2: Programs
4.3.7: Special Groups and Agencies
4.3.8: Temporary Service
4.4: Public Education and Information

How thoroughly these standards treat consumer issues can readily be seen. It is pertinent to note in reviewing them that these Standards are successors to a prior set of ALA-developed standards which have been observed by NLS (in its earlier configurations) since their development in 1956. They are, thus, evolutionary, rather than radical, changes from past operational standards in use at the library.

NLS Authorizing Legislation

The 1981 NLS Appropriations are based on authorizing legislation contained in Public Law 89-522, passed in 1966. The primary purpose of that bill was to expand the program to include the physically handicapped as well as blind. It contains no language relating to consumer input or responsibilities to consumers, simply the authorization statement "That there is authorized to be appropriated annually ... sums for expenditure ... to provide books ... and reproducers ... for the use of the blind ... and for other physically handicapped (persons)." Other sections relate to use of vendors in production of materials, and to the Library's music services. The committee report on this bill, Senate Report No. 1343 (89th Congress, 2nd Session), notes that the extension of service to the physically handicapped would not cause service to the blind to be "diluted in any way." It cites testimony by the Librarian of Congress on this point, who said, "A broader spectrum of reading materials would be available, and with more groups concerned in the program, there should also be a broader base of support." The term "concerned in" connotes "interested in," by implication indicating that the library's services are responsive to input received from its consumers. This particular point does not, however, appear in the bill.

Thus in terms of authorizing legislation itself, the mandate for responsibilities to consumers is limited to providing books and equipment. The interpretation of this as necessitating user input occurs within the agency. The degree of commitment to that interpretation, however, is very strong, as demonstrated by the General Statement made in testimony on the 1981 Appropriations, which presented the following management objectives:

1. A multifaceted patron comment program will be designed and implemented to ensure regular and systematic consumer input into programs and procedures;
2. A comprehensive review of NLS resources offered to blind, visually, and physically handicapped patrons will be undertaken, and alternate methods of information transfer will be examined;
3. Public service performance standards will be applied to improve delivery of machines and books to readers, and operating procedures will be analyzed to ensure even more efficient use of funds and manpower resources; and
4. Quality control standards will be applied to all internal and external materials production systems.

Testimony of the Director of NLS on the 1982 Appropriations reinforced this commitment: "Our staff is fully aware of the needs of the clientele. ... We have strong incentive to put out a quality product. ... We have a readership of 800,000. ... With a handful of exceptions, I would say, we have minimal problems."

From an earlier, very indirect reference to consumer-relations matters, language on that subject has become the leading item in the agency's proposed administrative plan. This is indicative of the strong role NLS has taken on for itself in developing a formal consumer-relations effort.

Administrative Documents

The regulatory basis for the consumer relations function can be found in Library of Congress Regulation No. 219-8, published June 23, 1980, which establishes and describes the functions of the Consumer Relations Section:

> The Consumer Relations Section establishes and maintains active liaison with individual users and consumer groups; conducts continuing user surveys; disseminates information about user inquiries; provides information and reference assistance to readers; conducts user orientations and tours; provides general guidance on the development and coordination of volunteer activities for network agencies and users, including identifying local volunteers for special projects; and arranges contacts and services abroad, including direct service to eligible U.S. citizens who reside overseas, and the international gift, exchange and interlibrary loan programs for special format materials.

Further specifications can be found in the Position Description for the Head of the Consumer Relations Section. The primary duties with regard to this function are listed as follows:

1. Directs services to individual readers and to consumer groups. Through correspondence, speeches, telephone, and other methods, maintains contact with these individuals and groups to ensure responsiveness to consumer concerns and their continued active participation in all aspects of NLS program planning. Acts as the national liaison or ombudsman with consumers. Coordinates workshops and meetings relating to services provided by the Consumer Relations Section. Assists in user orientations and tours of NLS; disseminates information about user concerns to appropriate NLS staff; coordinates multi-answer responses to user inquiries; provides information and assistance to walk-in readers to NLS.

2. Designs and implements a multifaceted patron comment program to ensure regular and systematic consumer input into NLS programs and procedures. Advises and assists in directing any methods developed for systematic and regular input by consumers, such as surveys, panels, committees, etc.; drafts and monitors appropriate contracts.

3. Plans and develops programs for improving NLS communications and services to groups with specialized needs such as hospital patients, nursing home residents, and other institutionalized readers, American Indians, veterans, and deaf blind readers, including the establishment of pilot projects, model procedures, and service handbooks for possible use by network agencies.

In addition, volunteer program coordination and operation of other duties of the section such as international library loan and circulation to readers abroad are listed, as are public education activities.

By these official documents, consumer input functions are now well-defined and organizationally established at NLS.

IV. CONCLUSION

These four tools constitute the bases for NLS' responsibilities in the consumer relations area. As can be seen, the responsibilities are, by and large, self imposed, taken on as part of a growing recognition of the role of the consumer and the determined effort of NLS in recent years to make all of its services and operations more efficient through establishment of overall coordinating systems to eliminate duplication and improve information availability and hence responsiveness to users.

This commitment, combined with the wide diversity of consumer relations activities in use at NLS and in its network described in the preceding chapter, demonstrates the high degree of responsibility to consumers and for obtaining consumer input held by the agency.

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APPENDIX TO CHAPTER III

Executive Order 12160

1. The Consumer's Executive Order

By virtue of the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution of the United States of America, and in order to improve the management, coordination, and effectiveness of agency consumer programs, it is ordered as follows:

1-1. *Establishment of the Consumer Affairs Council.*

1-101. There is hereby established the Consumer Affairs Council (hereinafter referred to as the "Council").

1-102. The Council shall consist of representatives of the following agencies, and such other officers or employees of the United States as the President may designate as members:

(a) Department of Agriculture.

(b) Department of Commerce.

(c) Department of Defense.

(d) Department of Energy.

(e) Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

(f) Department of Housing and Urban Development.

(g) Department of the Interior.

(h) Department of Justice.

(i) Department of Labor.

(j) Department of State.

(k) Department of Transportation.

(l) Department of the Treasury.

Each agency on the Council shall be represented by the head of the agency or by a senior-level official designated by the head of the agency.

1-2. *Functions of the Council.*

1-201. The Council shall provide leadership and coordination to ensure that agency consumer programs are implemented effectively; and shall strive to maximize effort, promote efficiency and interagency cooperation, and to eliminate duplication and inconsistency among agency consumer programs.

1-3. *Designation and Functions of the Chairperson.*

1-301. The President shall designate the chairperson of the Council (hereinafter referred to as the "Chairperson").

1-302. The Chairperson shall be the presiding officer of the Council and shall determine the times when the Council shall convene.

1-303. The Chairperson shall establish such policies, definitions, procedures, and standards to govern the implementation, interpretation, and application of this Order, and generally perform such functions and take such steps, as are necessary or appropriate to carry out the provisions of this Order.

1–4. *Consumer Program Reforms.*

1–401. The Chairperson, assisted by the Council, shall ensure that agencies review and revise their operating procedures so that consumer needs and interests are adequately considered and addressed. Agency consumer programs should be tailored to fit particular agency characteristics, but those programs shall include, at a minimum, the following five elements:

(a) *Consumer Affairs Perspective.* Agencies shall have identifiable, accessible professional staffs of consumer affairs personnel authorized to participate, in a manner not inconsistent with applicable statutes, in the development and review of all agency rules, policies, programs, and legislation.

(b) *Consumer Participation.* Agencies shall establish procedures for the early and meaningful participation by consumers in the development and review of all agency rules, policies, and programs. Such procedures shall include provisions to assure that consumer concerns are adequately analyzed and considered in decisionmaking. To facilitate the expression of those concerns, agencies shall provide for forums at which consumers can meet with agency decisionmakers. In addition, agencies shall make affirmative efforts to inform consumers of pending proceedings and of the opportunities available for participation therein.

(c) *Informational Materials.* Agencies shall produce and distribute materials to inform consumers about the agencies' responsibilities and services, about their procedures for consumer participation, and about aspects of the marketplace for which they have responsibility. In addition, each agency shall make available to consumers who attend agency meetings open to the public materials designed to make those meetings comprehensible to them.

(d) *Education and Training.* Agencies shall educate their staff members about the Federal consumer policy embodied in this Order and about the agencies' programs for carrying out that policy. Specialized training shall be provided to agency consumer affairs personnel and, to the extent considered appropriate by each agency and in a manner not inconsistent with applicable statutes, technical assistance shall be made available to consumers and their organizations.

(e) *Complaint Handling.* Agencies shall establish procedures for systematically logging in, investigating, and responding to consumer complaints, and for integrating analyses of complaints into the development of policy.

1–402. The head of each agency shall designate a senior-level official within that agency to exercise, as the official's sole responsibility, policy direction for, and coordination and oversight of, the agency's consumer activities. The designated official shall report directly to the head of the agency and shall apprise the agency head of the potential impact on consumers of particular policy initiatives under development or review within the agency.

1–5. *Implementation of Consumer Program Reforms.*

1–501. Within 60 days after the issuance of this Order, each agency shall prepare a draft report setting forth with specificity its program for complying with the requirements of Section 1–4 above. Each agency shall publish its draft consumer program in the Federal Register and shall give the public 60 days to comment on the program. A copy of the program shall be sent to the Council.

1–502. Each agency shall, within 30 days after the close of the public comment period on its draft consumer program, submit a revised program to the Chairperson. The Chairperson shall be responsible, on behalf of the President, for approving agency programs for compliance with this Order before their final publication in the Federal Register. Each agency's final program shall be published no later than 90 days after the close of the public comment period, and shall include a summary of public comments on the draft program and a discussion of how those comments are reflected in the final program.

1–503. Each agency's consumer program shall take effect no later than 30 days after its final publication in the Federal Register.

1-504. The Chairperson, with the assistance and advice of the Council, shall monitor the implementation by agencies of their consumer programs.

1-505. The Chairperson shall, promptly after the close of the fiscal year, submit to the President a full report on government-wide progress under this Order during the previous fiscal year. In addition, the Chairperson shall evaluate, from time to time, the consumer programs of particular agencies and shall report to the President as appropriate. Such evaluations shall be informed by appropriate consultations with interested parties.

1-6. *Budget Review.*

1-601. Each agency shall include a separate consumer program exhibit in its yearly budget submission to the Office of Management and Budget. By October 1 of each year the Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall provide the Chairperson with a copy of each of these exhibits. The Chairperson shall thereafter provide OMB with an analysis of the adequacy of the management of, and the funding and staff levels for, particular agency consumer programs.

1-7. *Civil Service Initiatives.*

1-701. In order to strengthen the professional standing of consumer affairs personnel, and to improve the recruitment and training of such personnel, the Office of Personnel Management shall consult with the Council regarding:

(a) the need for new or revised classification and qualification standard(s), consistent with the requirements of Title 5, United States Code, to be used by agencies in their classification of positions which include significant consumer affairs duties;

(b) the recruitment and selection of employees for the performance of consumer affairs duties; and

(c) the training and development of employees for the performance of such duties.

1-8. *Administrative Provisions.*

1-801. Executive agencies shall cooperate with and assist the Council and the Chairperson in the performance of their functions under this Order and shall on a timely basis furnish them with such reports as they may request.

1-802. The Chairperson shall utilize the assistance of the United States Office of Consumer Affairs in fulfilling the responsibilities assigned to the Chairperson under this Order.

1-803. The Chairperson shall be responsible for providing the Council with such administrative services and support as may be necessary or appropriate; agencies shall assign, to the extent not inconsistent with applicable statutes, such personnel and resources to the activities of the Council and the Chairperson as will enable the Council and the Chairperson to fulfill their responsibilities under this Order.

1-804. The Chairperson may invite representatives of non-member agencies, including independent regulatory agencies, to participate from time to time in the functions of the Council.

1-9. *Definitions.*

1-901. "Consumer" means any individual who uses, purchases, acquires, attempts to purchase or acquire, or is offered or furnished any real or personal property, tangible or intangible goods, services, or credit for personal, family, or household purposes.

1-902. "Agency" or "agencies" means any department or agency in the executive branch of the Federal government, except that the term shall not include:

(a) independent regulatory agencies, except as noted in subsection 1-804;

(b) agencies to the extent that their activities fall within the categories excepted in Sections 6(b)(2), (3), (4), and (6) of Executive Order No. 12044.

(c) agencies to the extent that they demonstrate within 30 days of the date of issuance of this Order, to the satisfaction of the Chairperson with the advice of the Council, that their activities have no substantial impact upon consumers.

Jimmy Carter

THE WHITE HOUSE,
September 26, 1979.

NOTE.—Executive Order 12160 was originally published in the Federal Register on September 28, 1979 (44 FR 44787).

Chapter IV - A Consumer Input Program for NLS and Network Agencies

PREAMBLE

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress has for fifty years provided braille and talking books with listening equipment on loan to eligible handicapped residents of the United States and US citizens living abroad. The materials are distributed through a network of libraries and support agencies, including about sixty Regional libraries operated for the most part by state agencies, and about one hundred Subregional libraries serving parts of states under Regional libraries. The Library of Congress provides the materials and equipment; all staff and facilities are provided by the states. However, the National Library Service (NLS) offers substantial assistance to the states in the form of management procedures manuals, public relations materials, site visits, and conferences.

The NLS has always been deeply committed to meeting the needs of the users of its materials, its consumers. These needs are identified through a variety of processes. This Consumer Relations Plan is being developed to formalize this ongoing, multi-faceted activity, in order to provide efficiency through coordination and improved information flow regarding consumer participation, consumer input, and provision of information on services available to, and NLS responsibilities toward consumers.

This Plan is divided into six sections as follows:

I. Statement of Philosophy and Direction

II. Consumer Relations at NLS

III. Consumer Relations at Regional Libraries

IV. Consumer Relations at Subregional Libraries

V. Consumer Relations of Other Network Agencies

VI. Implementation

Section I presents NLS's commitment to consumer relations, in the following subsections: Consumer Affairs Perspective, Consumer Participation, Information Materials, Education and Training, and Complaint Handling. These subject headings are then used under the successive sections on the various types of network agencies, to present the activities to be conducted.

This plan is the first of three chapters comprising a handbook for network agencies in developing and establishing consumer relations activities. It presents the policy perspectives for each agency type in the network; the next chapter reviews specific activities more extensively.

I. STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND DIRECTION

Consumer Affairs Perspective

As evidence of its commitment to meeting the special needs of its users, NLS has established a Consumer Relations Section, with specific duties in the consumer relations area. More than half of the staff of this section are visually impaired and are users of the Library's services.

This section establishes and maintains liaison with individual users and consumer groups; conducts continuing surveys; disseminates information about user inquiries; provides information and reference assistance to readers; conducts user orientations and tours; and provides general guidance on the development and coordination of volunteer activities for network agencies and users, including identifying local volunteers for special projects. It also arranges contacts and services abroad, including direct service to eligible U.S. citizens who reside overseas; and the international gift and exchange and interlibrary loan programs for special format materials.

This section's efforts in consumer affairs will provide focus and visibility within NLS and throughout the network concerning the importance of active consumer relations programs at all agency levels.

Consumer Participation

The NLS has always given substantial attention to provision of multiple means for obtaining consumer input. These include advisory committees, surveys, attendance at conferences, and extensive correspondence and telephone calls with consumers. In addition, much network communication concerns consumer issues.

All sections at NLS are involved to some extent in consumer relations; the NLS is a library collections support service, and as such users' input is a part of its operation. However, the service is provided to the users for the most part not directly by NLS but by libraries in almost every state in the country; primary reader contact occurs there. Users are free to contact NLS directly, and many do; most of these contacts result in referrals to the user's local library for assistance.

Network libraries vary greatly in size and resources, but all are aware of the need for user feedback and the importance of such activities as reader surveys, newsletters, toll-free telephone lines, and consumer advisory meetings.

The formation of the Consumer Relations Section was undertaken to manage the process by which users are involved in NLS' functions, given the many points within the agency and the network with which users have contact.

The Consumer Relations Section is involved in the coordination of any responses to user inquiries which require the participation of more than one section at NLS, as is often the case. In addition, this section actively assists network agencies in developing and conducting responsive consumer relations programs.

This coordination function, together with internal training and external consumer contact as cited above, demonstrates agency orientation toward consumer relations. The handbook of which this plan is a part provides a compilation of consumer relations activities and procedures for use by network agencies. Its use will increase awareness of the importance of and need for coordinated consumer relations activities at the local agency level, resulting in a more formalized, explicit consumer relations effort at all network agency levels.

An explicit objective of the NLS Consumer Relations Section's coordination role is the utilization of the views and perspectives of the program's readers in the development of agency rules, policies, and programs, at local, state, and national levels. Given the importance of this objective, NLS and network agencies will strive to assure that consumers are made aware of all forums and meetings where consumer input to the library is to be discussed, well in advance.

Information Materials

Many potential users of the library's service are only temporarily in need due to visual or physical impairment following surgery, or become eligible late in life. There is a need for a strong public education effort to enable such users to discover and utilize the service. NLS produces numerous materials in various media, distributing them itself via attendance and exhibits at conferences, and through the network agencies. These materials include, for sighted persons who may be physically handicapped or may know of visually impaired persons, numerous fliers and publications on the program and professionally produced Public Service Announcements (PSAs) for airing over commercial radio and television stations, and for potentially eligible persons, similar matter on discs which may be played on any phonograph.

Through this extensive materials production effort, which will include specific consumer oriented materials as well, NLS and the network agencies are carrying out a strong philosophy of outreach, information exchange, and public and user feedback. This effort will continue to be a major consumer relations function.

Education and Training

NLS holds monthly orientation sessions, three days in length, for new staff, contractors, network staff, consumers, those from organizations serving the blind and physically handicapped, and other interested persons. These thorough introductions to the operations of NLS provide a complete review of agency operations. Each presentation is given by a section head or delegate, not by a separate training office, thus accurately presenting the operations of the agency.

The Consumer Relations Section participates in these orientations as well, informing staff as well as visitors of its functions. The Head of the Consumer Relations Section maintains contacts with the heads of all other sections to assure coordinated consumer relations, and provide training where needed as to effective procedures. NLS provides education and training to network agencies in consumer relations through consultant visits, materials, and direct contact. The Consumer Relations Section Head travels to network agencies to assist in the development and establishment of consumer programs and staff consumer relations training network-wide. While NLS can furnish only materials and equipment, not staff, every effort is made to provide effective management support through these means. Every two years representatives of all network agencies attend a national conference, at which issues are discussed, new procedures announced, and problems and proposed solutions are aired. These numerous methods, discussed further in later sections, indicate the commitment of the NLS and network agencies to educating and training in the consumer relations area, and underscore the cooperative nature of NLS/network program activities.

Complaint Handling

NLS and network agencies will have multiple, formal methods for complaint handling, which are conducted in a manner designed to secure prompt resolution and not permit problems to become merged into general consumer input information. From "charge letters," or highest priority inquiry responses, monitored by the Office of the NLS Director, to routine contact of network library staff with readers, to correspondence and communications to and between the network agencies, multiple, formal methods are followed to resolve consumer complaints. Those involving NLS are assessed in regular administrative staff meetings, and response procedures are selected. At network agencies, they are responded to locally; if important or unusually numerous on a particular topic they are shared with NLS. Modifications to operational procedures may be made, if appropriate. This form of input contributes directly to the agency policy-making process, a very important facet of NLS', and the network agencies', commitment to consumer relations.

Regional librarians play a key decision-making role in this communication and coordination process. They are responsible for assuring that pertinent consumer relations input is shared, and NLS correspondingly is committed to supporting a collaborative, coordinated means for using as well as reacting to this input.

II. CONSUMER RELATIONS AT NLS

This section will focus specifically on NLS activities, as opposed to those which occur only at network agencies. All issues concerning communication and coordination between NLS and the network agencies are included in this section, due to the great importance of these links in the conveying of consumer input through the network to NLS.

Consumer Affairs Perspective

A Consumer Relations Section has been established at NLS. This section consists of three full-time professional staff: The Head of the Section, a Volunteer/Consumer Specialist, and a Librarian who coordinates overseas service. While consumer relations functions are not the sole duty of any of these staff, the creation of this section serves to highlight this important function, and the considerable activities of these staff members in their other duties, will provide a consumer relations orientation throughout the operations of this section. All correspondence from other sections which concerns consumers should be shared with this section.

Consumer Participation

The chart on the next page, reiterating the multifacted consumer relations functions which occur throughout NLS, lists each NLS section and its consumer input functions indicating the consumer involvement of each section in on-going operations, demonstrating the breadth of this participation.

Figure 4

Consumer Input Processing and Consumer Relations Functions of NLS Sections

Division/Section	Function
Office of the Director (OD)	Ultimately responsible for nature and handling of responses to input.
Administrative Section	Routes incoming calls, mail; assists drop-in visitors.
Publications/Media Section	Conducts public education, including materials and PSAs.
Facilities/Materials Handling	Receives input accompanying equipment, music, international materials.
Network Division (ND)	
Office of the Chief	Operates Network consultant program, coordinates all Network/Consumer relations.
Braille Codes	Conducts proofreading course, answers technical braille questions.
Consumer Relations	Liaison with users, network libraries, and consumer groups; ensures response and reaction to input, coordination of multiple-inquiry response; international service.
Music	Circulates music materials directly to patrons and answers all music international interlibrary loan requests and all correspondence and reference inquiries about music.
Network Services	Prepares bibliographies, coordinates circulation.
Reference	Most written queries, especially regarding NLS enrollment/services; reference services for NLS, network staff including blind and physically handicapped.
Materials Development Division (MDD)	
Office of the Chief	Coordinates evaluation and demonstration of current/planned equipment.
Collection Development	Coordinates Ad Hoc Committee on Collection Building Activities, foreign language program, responds to consumer suggestions.
Bibliographic Control	Utility of fiction subject classifications.
Production Control	Timeliness and quantity in production of new materials; narration, media problem identification.
Quality Assurance	Monitoring of Quality Assurance maintenance and problem resolution.
Engineering	Demonstrations, plans for new equipment/materials.

There are numerous activities which are not shown, as they are subsumed under these functions, or occur only periodically. These include annual meetings of the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Collection Building Activities, a group comprised of consumers, and network librarians; an in-WATS toll-free number, for the use of patrons of the NLS Music Collection (a specialized collection of the network circulated directly from NLS), for network librarians, volunteers, and others; internal administrative meetings at which consumer input and consumer relations issues are discussed; on-going work by network Consultants who visit every Regional library every two years for oversight and assistance purposes, including assessment of consumer relations activities; conferences both held by and attended for NLS, by staff of various sections; surveys of readers nationally or locally, such as recent User and non-User surveys and the Combination Machine Evaluation Study; and internal input from visually handicapped NLS staff.

Information Materials

NLS produces and distributes numerous newsletters, bulletins, catalogs and periodicals. Newsletters include Overseas Outlook, for readers living abroad; Update, for volunteers who assist NLS and network agencies; and NLS News, which is sent to all public libraries in the U.S. These are available in print or special media. Network Bulletins are memos to network agencies on operations procedures; NLS Facts is an occasional public information bulletin on new developments at NLS.

Since most NLS consumers interact with their libraries by mail rather than in person, NLS produces periodic catalog selections listings for users, as well as the quarterly updated full catalog furnished to network libraries. These listings are provided, depending on the medium being used by a reader, in Talking Book Topics or Braille Book Review. In addition, special-collection catalogs are produced periodically, such as for younger readers, and complete catalogs for cassette and braille books are produced annually and biannually, respectively. NLS produces two periodicals for its music users, the Musical Mainstream, concerning its collection and classical music generally, and Contemporary Sound-track, concerning popular music. Finally, NLS produces Libros Parlantes, a Spanish-language periodical drawing from other NLS publications and serving also for listing selections from the Spanish language collection.

NLS also produces manuals to assist network libraries in their work with consumers, such as "Reaching People: A Manual on Public Education," "Volunteers Who Produce Books," a directory of organizations, and "Creating an Annotation," a guide for cataloging locally-produced books.

NLS supports consumer involvement through these materials which go to the users of the library's services and which contain considerable consumer-oriented information and requests for suggestions.

Education and Training

NLS conducts periodic internal meetings at both the Divisional and Directorate levels at which consumer relations are discussed. Those portions of these meetings involving internal coordination with regard to consumer input assessment can involve the Consumer Relations Section in processing and response, and consumer participation policy development. Personnel from other sections within the Network Division should provide copies of correspondence with consumers to the Consumer Relations Section. Based on these files and other information the Head of the Consumer Relations Section could meet with the heads of other sections concerning training in consumer relations and/or modifications to procedures used by that section in responding to consumer input.

Complaint Handling

Consumer input that requires response is identified at NLS and routed to the appropriate section under the guidance of the Consumer Relations Section. the Reference Section, the Chief of the Network Division, the Project Coordinator, or the Director. Thus, responses are coordinated, and assessment of policy impact of given consumer problems by topic is accomplished in a dynamic, ongoing systematic manner. It is merged in this process with information received from the network Consultants from their site visits.

A substantial number of user complaints concern problems in utilizing the service. These are in large part due to the multi-agency nature of the network (due to the volume of circulation and materials dissemination functions which it performs) and the fact that its users are persons with handicapping conditions which impede their ability to utilize many consumer products and services. NLS' complaint handling policy is to respond to the subject at hand, to refer the user back to her/his local library for follow-up, and to then contact that library to inform it of the complaint and NLS response, in order to alert staff to the person's need. Often, for example, a particular book title has been requested which must be sought in another network agency; this is the library's function, not the user's responsibility.

III. CONSUMER RELATIONS AT REGIONAL LIBRARIES

Consumer Affairs Perspective

As network libraries are operated entirely from non-NLS funds, NLS has no direct control over their staffing configurations. Readership varies widely in size, and of course determines staffing needs; libraries range in readership from three states having fewer than 1,000 individual readers each to eight network libraries (Regional or Subregional) having total readership of over 30,000 each (1980 NLS data). With such great variation in size it is only possible to recommend general consumer relations staffing patterns.

The Regional libraries can, however, be grouped based on size, bearing in mind that each is responsible for circulation within its province whether or not Subregional libraries exist. By dividing the Regionals into the following four categories, more specific recommendations can be made in each of the several areas of consumer affairs:

Readership	% of Libraries	% of Readers
less than 3,000 readers	25	3
3,000-8,000 readers	32	21
8,000-15,000 readers	30	39
more than 15,000 readers	14	37

The last category, while representing fewer libraries, represents as many readers as the next largest, although it contains only half as many libraries, since some of them are, as indicated above, very large. Thus, different amounts of effort can be undertaken by different categories of library. Specific activities for such differing agency size categories will be presented in the second chapter of this handbook, where the differing levels of allocation of resources are described as well (less, the same, or more than at present).

Consumer Participation

All Regional libraries are requested to support certain consumer related functions, and are monitored in these areas by the NLS network Consultants. These include having a consumer advisory committee, surveying readers, working with other related local institutions and organizations, providing effective reader advisory service, operating a public education program, providing telephone access for readers, and so forth. The NLS/network program operates pursuant to a set of standards developed by the American Library Association. Network Consultants use a checklist based on these standards in conducting their monitoring visits. A list of items from this checklist which deal with consumer relations, indicating some of the activities which Regional libraries are encouraged to offer, is appended to this chapter.

Information Materials

Regional libraries supplement the books, magazines, catalogs, and other publications produced by NLS which they distribute, with locally produced material. This includes new-reader packets, which explain how the particular library's circulation system works; catalogs of locally-produced material; the local library newsletter, which may include items obtained from NLS; and other material. The Regional libraries may also circulate print or special medium materials about other programs or services available in that state from public or private organizations.

Education and Training

Regional libraries are requested to have new librarians travel to NLS in order to participate in an NLS Orientation within six months after they are hired. Consumer-oriented training is accomplished by use of the handbook of which this chapter is a part. It encourages Regional libraries to establish and develop consumer relations activities such as newsletters, surveys, and advisory group meetings. Questions on such activities can be directed to the Head of the Consumer Relations Section at NLS, who is also available to assist network agencies in their education and training efforts in the area of consumer affairs.

Complaint Handling

Regional librarians are aware of the need to operate effective complaint receipt, logging, assessment and resolution procedures in their libraries.

Numerous consumer requests may require contact with NLS before they can be resolved; it is the Regional library's responsibility to initiate such contact when appropriate, as well as in general to inform NLS of pertinent consumer input. NLS maintains a toll-free telephone line which can be used by network agencies for this purpose. While periodic reporting of consumer complaints is not required of Regional libraries, the predominantly dynamic information network which is maintained in the operation of the network's activities assures that appropriate consumer complaints are brought to the attention of NLS from network agencies. Procedures for disposition of complaints received via the network parallel procedures outlined in the previous section for disposition of complaints received directly at NLS from consumers; the proposed input tracking system will augment these.

IV. CONSUMER RELATIONS AT SUBREGIONAL LIBRARIES

Subregional Libraries can be established by state Regional libraries when a sufficient number of users is found in a portion of a state to operate a separate, more local facility. Usually, the Subregional library will circulate books only, not equipment. NLS network Consultants do not regularly visit Subregional libraries. Only about 20% of states operate Subregional libraries; this section applies to them alone.

Consumer Affairs Perspective

As geographically Subregional libraries are less distant from their readers than are Regional libraries, which generally serve entire states, Subregional libraries have the best opportunity to maintain ongoing contact with the largest portion of their users. While the bulk of their circulation is still accomplished by mail, there is a greater possibility for in-person contact with users in an advisory capacity. The Subregional librarian will make every effort to allow time for this important function.

Consumer Participation

Every Subregional library tries to have at least one mailing to its readers a year, if not more, as a form of periodic contact and statement of interest in the needs and views of the reader and invitation to comment to the library. Subregional libraries convene at least one meeting of representative consumers for discussion of consumer-related issues concerning their library's operations annually, and poll their readers on various issues and preferences every two-to-three years. A brief "mini-survey" wherein the reader advisors ask a limited number of questions of any users who call in during a one or two week period, is a possible low-cost means for obtaining such information.

Information Materials

Every Subregional library assures that the materials it sends out, whether produced by NLS, the Regional library, or itself, contain an indication to readers that the library is interested in the views and involvement of its readers. This is particularly important when a problem arises with the equipment, the book materials, or the service. Such statements are, if possible, in the same medium as the books a reader normally receives.

Education and Training

Subregional library staff are made aware of the consumer relations training materials available to them. Reader advisors should be trained in courteous contact with users.

Complaint Handling

All complaints are conveyed to the Subregional librarian for disposition. Those that cannot be resolved locally should be conveyed to the Regional librarian. The Subregional librarian should be aware of the implications of complaint topics for possible improvements in library operations, and of the responsibility to pass pertinent user input on to the Regional library.

V. CONSUMER RELATIONS OF OTHER NETWORK AGENCIES

Aside from network libraries, there are other types of agencies in the network which may have contact with readers. These include deposit and demonstration collections, which are small collections loaned as a group to institutions such as nursing homes for local circulation; machine lending agencies, in states where neither the Regional library nor Subregional libraries are assigned responsibility for circulation of equipment needed by users, including cassette and disc players, amplifiers, and associated materials; and Multistate Centers, or MSCs, which are operated by NLS as repositories for collection materials and by design have no direct contact with users.

Consumer Perspective

Each of these agencies is aware of the importance of consumer relations. Staff involved should forward any consumer input to the appropriate network agency. For deposit/demonstration collections and machine lending agencies this is the Regional library; for MSCs it is the contract monitor at NLS or the appropriate library.

Consumer Participation

These network agencies are not customarily involved in initiating consumer relations activities.

Information Materials

Any materials developed by these agencies which will be used by readers are open to consumer feedback, prepared in a friendly style and in a format appropriate to the needs of users.

Education and Training

These agencies make their staff aware of the consumer perspective of the NLS and the network, and stress a supportive and cooperative manner in all dealings with consumers.

Complaint Handling

Collections and machine lending agencies will only attempt to resolve complaints which are within their purview, and should refer all other consumer problems to the Regional library. MSCs should refer all consumer input received to the contract monitor at NLS.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

Programs based on this Consumer Input Plan will be implemented annually by NLS and network agencies, using the level of effort plans developed at each agency. Each agency should strive for the comprehensive implementation of its plan each year, and for development of plans in successive years that realistically build on progress to date in the area of improved consumer relations.

It is important that the implementation of this Plan be undertaken network-wide so that a coordinated set of activities can be acknowledged network-wide. This will provide a thoroughly open consumer relations orientation at all network agencies, which is necessary so that all NLS readers are provided the opportunity to be involved with their libraries. Consumer participation is a means for obtaining consumer input. The establishment of numerous methods for consumer participation is a necessary prior step. Only when consumers are offered the opportunity to become actively involved in their library, whether many choose to do so or not, can the library amply serve its readers. Libraries are reminded as well that the concept of consumer input concerns not just receptivity to suggestions concerning administrative matters but can and should extend to more fundamental aspects of agency operations, including assessment of internal operations and organizational procedures.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER IV

CONSULTANT CHECKLIST

CONSUMER RELATED ITEMS

Advisory Committee

1. An advisory committee composed of a representative group of users and members of related organizations should be established and used actively in the formulation of policy and planning. Regular meetings are necessary.

The Community

2. A survey should be made in the community of current users and eligible non-users. One study would be aimed at evaluating effectiveness of service in meeting current user needs; another, for determining what service might be instituted to make the program relevant.

3. The regional library should be familiar with organizations that have functions paralleling the regional library program.

4. Staff of the regional library should maintain liaison with and, where appropriate, become active members or officers of community organizations.

5. The regional librarian should be familiar with public, university, special and school libraries in order to refer patrons to the library that is best able to meet their particular needs.

Reader Advisory Service

6. The regional library should help patrons to obtain the material they desire by preparing and distributing annotated bibliographies in the format required.

7. Locally produced material recently acquired or related to specific subjects should be announced in regional library newsletters and other releases, and distributed to all registered borrowers.

Public Education Program

8. Exhibits and displays should be set up, where possible, at meetings and conferences. Demonstration collections in public libraries, schools, or other appropriate institutions are encouraged.

9. The library should maintain active liaison with appropriate related institutions, including nursing homes, organizations for the blind and handicapped, hospitals, and educational groups.

10. Through close cooperation with the local libraries in the area, and education of the staff of the local units regarding the services they could and should supply, patrons should be encouraged to use their local facilities wherever possible for services which are as appropriate to them as they are to the non-handicapped.

11. The regional library should be able to communicate with its patrons, as required, contacting them when problems arise and making regular checks to assure patron satisfaction with the program.

12. The reader should be able to contact the regional library by telephone when he so desires. This should be at no charge to the reader, either through the use of In-WATS or unlimited acceptance of collect calls.

13. The regional library should be able to communicate with patrons in the most appropriate medium for that individual.

14. The regional library should budget for and allocate time to visiting individuals and institutions.

15. Outreach and community service.

Reader Advisors

16. A familiarity with books and library procedures, and the ability to deal effectively and pleasantly with the public, are important for this position.

17. Money should be allocated and plans made to send each new professional employee having completed six months on the job to participate in the DBPH three-day orientation program, and where appropriate in the multistate center's orientation program.

Professional Involvement

18. Appropriate personnel should be active in local, state, and national organizations.

Physical Facilities

19. All buildings should be accessible to the handicapped.

Chapter V - Consumer Relations Activities for NLS Network Agencies

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is designed to serve as a reference guide for network libraries to use in developing plans for consumer relations activities each year. It is presented in the form of an annotated outline, so as to make it possible to address the particular situations of different types of library, yet have each section be easy to locate. It is to be used in conjunction with the previous chapter, A Consumer Input Program Plan for NLS and Network Agencies, which presents more general organizational considerations. In combination, these two chapters will enable librarians to understand the multiple facets of the consumer relations aspect of NLS and network activities, and can develop specific annual plans which support them. A point of primary importance in developing these plans is the following:

INVOLVE CONSUMERS IN THE DESIGN OF THE CONSUMER RELATIONS PLAN

Newsletters (special edition or regular issue) can be used to announce the planning process and solicit recommendations and suggestions by phone or mail; roundtable discussion at consumer advisory committee meetings held during the planning period can be helpful in refining the activities proposed.

Format and Definitions

Several levels of grouping of libraries have been used in this listing, as indicated above. Regional libraries are addressed separately from Subregionals;

regionals are further broken into groups based on number of individual readers served as documented in the FY 80 Readership and Circulation Supplement to the 1980 document, "Library Resources for the Blind and Physically Handicapped." The groupings are: (1) Fewer than 3,000 readers; (2) Between 3,000 and 8,000 readers; (3) Between 8,000 and 15,000 readers; and (4) More than 15,000 readers.

These groupings were chosen so as to divide the Regional libraries into groups that are roughly equal. As these libraries have average staff complements of 5½, 12, 17½, and 27, respectively, the administration of consumer relations activities will clearly differ across the size spectrum. The Subregional libraries have not been differentiated out by size; most are quite small compared even to the smallest regional library group.

Within these groupings, two additional subclassifications are used. The first of these is designed to accommodate the need for libraries even of the same size to devote different levels of resources to consumer relations due to differences in resources available, parent agency priorities, and other factors. The listing in the next section of this chapter presents, for the many different types of consumer relations activities possible, a recommended level of activity, which is what is hopefully being done at present, and two other levels, one lower and one higher. These accommodate situations where less is possible and as well where, due either to past commitment or to planning which will permit greater present and/or future allocation of resources, more can be undertaken than the recommended present level. It should be noted that the "less than present" level represents a minimum investment, e.g., that which should if at all possible be maintained. Correspondingly, the "more than present" level represents an optimum, or most desirable, level.

The final level of classification concerns the several different "arenas" of consumer relations: interacting with consumers, reporting consumer input to the NLS network, and developing and maintaining an awareness among the staff of the importance of good consumer relations. The headings that are used to indicate these different "arenas" are: External, for direct relations with consumers and consumer organizations; Intramural, or within the network (a term borrowed from medical research, where it is used to refer to work being done not within the agency but within the professional research community); and Internal, referring to the library's own staff. Logging procedures proposed are explained in more detail in Chapter VII.

1. Agency type;
2. Agency size (for Regional libraries);
3. Level of resources; and
4. Activity arena.

With this system, users of this guide should be able to both design reasonable yet supportive consumer relations plans, and should as well be able to develop plans for increasing their support in this area in future years.

II. REGIONAL LIBRARIES

A. Regional Libraries with Fewer Than 3,000 Readers

These libraries have on average between five and six full-time-equivalent staff members. This complement may consist of the librarian, a secretary, two reader advisors, and two mail handlers. Consumer relations activity plans must acknowledge the many demands on a librarian's time in such circumstances. However, the use of appropriately scaled activities, and different input feedback techniques, such as "mini-surveys" can provide for meaningful consumer feedback at relatively low cost in terms of staff time required.

1. Less than at present

a. External

1) Have at least one consumer advisory committee meeting sometime during the year. Announce plans to meet on a regular basis twice a year.

2) Have informal discussion and training sessions for the reader advisors, stressing the importance of the public relations aspects of their contact with readers and the public, at least annually (or as staff turnover dictates).

3) Keep a log for all input, from both users and others, by network-wide standardized subject categories.

4) Attend at least one city, chapter, or statewide meeting of local consumer organizations such as the American Council of the Blind, the National Association of the Physically Handicapped, or the National Federation of the Blind.

5) Have the reader advisors conduct a "mini-survey" of readers when they call in book orders, twice a year.

6) Send out a newsletter to all readers at least once a year.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS concerning your library's consumer relations activities and topics of interest as expressed by consumers, at least twice a year.

2) Respond fully to all items on the Annual Network Survey, enclosing with your response copies of your reader newsletter, updated new reader materials, etc.

3) Attend both biannual Regional and National network conferences, held in alternating years. Prepare for them in part by reviewing trends and topics in consumer input received by your library over the past year.

c. Internal

1) Have at least one general staff training session per year on the social, psychological, and other effects of handicapping conditions.

2) If appropriate, invite handicapped staff from your parent agency, or other appropriate state agency such as Governor's Advisory Council on the Handicapped, to attend staff training sessions.

II. REGIONAL LIBRARIES (cont'd)

A. Fewer than 3,000 Readers

2. Recommended/present level of resource commitment

   a. External

      1) Have at least two consumer advisory committee meetings per year. Announce plans to have these meetings regularly scheduled in the future, to be held quarterly.

      2) Have reader advisor discussion and training sessions twice each year.

      3) Log all user and public input, by subject categories.

      4) Attend National Federation of the Blind or American Council of the Blind local or state chapter meetings quarterly.

      5) Have the reader advisors conduct four "mini-surveys" during the year, on various topics.

      6) Send out a newsletter at least once every four months. Produce a special media version.

   b. Intramural

      1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS every three months.

      2) Send a sample copy of your most recent newsletter, and other locally developed materials, along with your completed Annual Network Survey Form each year.

      3) Attend both Regional and National network conferences; discuss consumer input and consumer issues with the Chairperson of your Regional conference at least four times a year in addition.

      4) Invite the Head of the Consumer Relations Section to attend a consumer advisory committee meeting and/or staff consumer relation training session.

   c. Internal

      1) Have two staff training sessions on handicapping conditions per year.

      2) Invite handicapped staff from your present agency or other appropriate state agency to attend training sessions.

II. REGIONAL LIBRARIES (cont'd)

A. Fewer than 3,000 Readers

3. More resources than present

a. External

1) Have at least one consumer advisory committee meeting every three months. Announce plans to meet regularly.

2) Have discussion and training sessions with the reader advisors at least twice each year.

3) Log and tabulate all consumer input received, whether by mail, phone or other means; review these logs quarterly and discuss the major consumer interest areas they identify with your staff, your Regional Chairperson and the Consumer Relations Section at NLS.

4) Update new reader materials annually.

5) Attend monthly city, state or other chapter meetings of two consumer organizations.

6) Have the reader advisors conduct four "mini-surveys" during the year; also conduct one telephone survey of 200 readers.

7) Send out a newsletter quarterly.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS every three months to discuss consumer input and consumer relations activities at your library and elsewhere in the network.

2) Place the Consumer Relations Section at NLS on your newsletter mailing list.

3) Attend Regional and National network conferences, and communicate with your Regional Chairperson every other month concerning consumer input topics and consumer relations activities at your library.

4) Invite the Head of the Consumer Relations Section to attend a consumer advisory committee meeting and/or staff consumer relations training session.

c. Internal

1) Schedule staff training sessions on handicapping conditions once every four months; arrange for one staff member to work at another agency serving the same population for a half-day.

2) Invite handicapped staff from your library's parent agency to attend staff meetings and training sessions.

II. REGIONAL LIBRARIES (cont'd)

B. Regional Libraries with Between 3,000 and 8,000 Readers

These libraries average 12 staff positions apiece, and therefore can develop more varied consumer relations programs than can smaller libraries. If there is an assistant librarian, the responsibilities for developing a consumer relations activities plan, as well as for conducting the activities thereof, can be shared between the librarian and the assistant.

1. Less than at present

a. External

1) Have at least two consumer advisory committee meetings sometime during the year. Announce plans to hold them on a regular basis.

2) Have informal discussion and training sessions for the reader advisors, stressing the importance of the public relations aspects of their work, at least twice each year.

3) Keep a log of all input, from both users and others, by broad subject categories.

4) Have at least two staff members attend city, chapter, or statewide meetings of a local consumer organization annually.

5) Have the reader advisors conduct four "mini-surveys" of readers on various topics.

6) Send out a newsletter to all readers at least twice a year. Put the Consumer Relations Section at NLS on the newsletter mailing list.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS concerning your library's consumer relations activities and topics of interest as expressed by consumers, at least twice a year.

2) Respond fully to all items on the Annual Network Survey, enclosing with your response copies of your reader newsletter, updated new reader materials, etc.

3) Attend both biannual Regional and National network conferences, held in alternating years. Communicate with the Regional Chairperson concerning local and regional consumer issues every three months.

c. Internal

1) Have two general staff training sessions per year on the social, psychological, and other effects of handicapping conditions.

2) If appropriate, invite handicapped staff from your parent agency, or other appropriate state agency such as Governor's Advisory Council on the Handicapped, to attend staff training sessions.

B. Between 3,000 and 8,000 Readers

2. Recommended/present level of resource commitment

a. External

1) Have at least four consumer advisory committee meetings per year. Announce plans to have these meetings regularly scheduled in the future.

2) Have quarterly reader advisor discussion and training sessions.

3) Log all user and public input, by subject categories.

4) Have at least two staff attend meetings of a local or state consumer organization quarterly.

5) Have the reader advisors conduct four "mini-surveys" during the year, on various topics. In addition, conduct one telephone survey of 200 readers.

6) Send out a newsletter quarterly. Produce a special media version.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS quarterly.

2) Send a sample copy of your most recent newsletter, and other locally developed materials, along with your completed Annual Network Survey form each year.

3) Attend both Regional and National network conferences; discuss consumer input and consumer issues with the Chairperson of your Regional conference every other month.

4) Invite the head of the Consumer Relation Section to attend a consumer advisory committee meeting and/or staff consumer relations training session.

c. Internal

1) Have staff training sessions on handicapping conditions quarterly.

2) Invite handicapped staff from your parent agency or other appropriate state agency to attend training sessions.

II. REGIONAL LIBRARIES (cont'd)

B. Between 3,000 and 8,000 Readers

3. More resources than present

a. External

1) Have at least one consumer advisory committee meeting every three months. Announce plans to meet regularly, bimonthly.

2) Have discussion and training sessions with the reader advisors, at least quarterly.

3) Log and tabulate all consumer input received, whether by mail, phone, or other means; review these logs quarterly and discuss the major consumer interest areas they identify with your staff, your Regional Chairperson and the Consumer Relations Section at NLS.

4) Update new reader materials annually.

5) Have at least two staff members attend monthly chapter meeting of two local or state consumer organizations.

6) Have reader advisors conduct four "mini-surveys" during the year; also conduct one telephone survey of 500 readers.

7) Send out a newsletter to readers bimonthly. Produce a special media version.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS every other month to discuss consumer input and consumer relations activities at your library and elsewhere in the network.

2) Have the Consumer Relations Section at NLS on your newsletter mailing list.

3) Attend Regional and National network conferences, and communicate with your Regional Chairperson every other month concerning consumer input topics and consumer relations activities at your library.

4) Invite the Head of the Consumer Relations Section to attend a consumer advisory committee meeting and/or a staff consumer relations training session.

c. Internal

1) Schedule staff training sessions on handicapping conditions once every four months; arrange for two staff members to work at another agency serving the same population for a half-day.

2) Invite handicapped staff from your library's parent agency to attend staff meetings and training sessions.

C. Regional Libraries with between 8,000 and 15,000 Readers

These libraries average over seventeen staff positions each. They are large enough for specific assignment of consumer relations functions to several individuals, such as the person charged with planning and conducting staff training, the one who prepares the newsletters, and one who could be assigned the planning and conducting of surveys (who may be one of the above). The librarian should coordinate the planning and conducting of consumer advisory committee meetings directly.

1. Less than at present

a. External

1) Have at least four consumer advisory committee meetings sometime during the year. Announce plans to meet quarterly on a regular basis.

2) Have informal discussion and training sessions for the reader advisors, stressing the importance of the public relations aspects of their work, at least twice a year.

3) Keep a log of all input, from both users and others, by broad subject categories.

4) Have three staff attend at least two city, chapter or statewide meetings of the local consumer organizations annually.

5) Have the reader advisors conduct four "mini-surveys" of readers; also conduct a telephone survey of 200 readers.

6) Send out a newsletter to all readers quarterly. Produce a special media version.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS concerning your library's consumer relations activities and topics of interest as expressed by consumers, at least twice a year.

2) Respond fully to all items on the Annual Network Survey, enclosing with your response copies of your reader newsletter, updated new reader materials, etc.

3) Attend both biannual Regional and National network conferences, held in alternating years. Call your Regional Chairperson bimonthly to discuss local and regional consumer affairs topics.

c. Internal

1) Have four general staff training sessions per year on the social, psychological, and other effects of handicapping conditions.

2) If appropriate, invite handicapped staff from your parent agency, or other appropriate state agency such as Governor's Advisory Council on the Handicapped, to attend staff training sessions.

C. Between 8,000 and 15,000 Readers

2. Recommended/present level of resource commitment

a. External

1) Hold a regularly scheduled consumer advisory committee meeting each quarter.

2) Have reader advisor discussion and training sessions every other month. Staff who supervise reader advisors should be kept sensitive to public relations issues as well.

3) Log all user and public input, by subject categories. Review tabulated logs quarterly.

4) Have three staff attend two consumer organization meetings quarterly.

5) Have the reader advisors conduct four "mini-surveys" during the year, on various topics. Also conduct two telephone surveys of 200 readers.

6) Send out a newsletter quarterly. Produce a special media version. Put the Consumer Relations Section at NLS on your newsletter mailing list.

7) Update new reader materials annually.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS quarterly.

2) Send a sample copy of your most recent newsletter, and other locally developed materials, along with your completed Annual Network Survey form each year.

3) Attend both Regional and National network conferences; discuss consumer input and consumer issues with the Chairperson of your Regional conference every other month.

4) Invite the Head of the Consumer Relations Section to attend a consumer advisory committee meeting and/or staff consumer relations training session.

c. Internal

1) Have six staff training sessions on handicapping conditions per year.

2) Invite handicapped staff from your parent agency or other appropriate state agency to attend training sessions.

C. Regional Libraries with Between 8,000 and 15,000 Readers

3. More resources than present

a. External

1) Have a regularly scheduled consumer advisory committee meeting every three months; pay travel expenses to enable two consumers from distant parts of the state to attend.

2) Have discussion and training sessions with the reader advisors and their supervisors every other month.

3) Log and tabulate all consumer input received, whether by mail, phone or other means; review these logs quarterly and discuss the major consumer interest areas they identify with your staff, your Regional Chairperson and the Consumer Relations Section at NLS.

4) Update new reader materials annually.

5) Have three staff attend regular city, state or other chapter meetings of three consumer organizations.

6) Have reader advisors conduct four mini-surveys during the year; also conduct two telephone surveys of 500 readers and one mail-out survey of 1000 readers.

7) Send out a newsletter to readers quarterly. Produce special media as well as large print versions.

8) For any reader who transfers from your library to another library in the network, call or write to them at their new home sixty days after they apply for a transfer to make sure that their new library has started service. If not, contact the library.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS every other month to discuss consumer input and consumer relations activities at your library and elsewhere in the network.

2) Send locally produced materials to NLS along with the Annual Network Survey forms.

3) Have the Consumer Relation Section at NLS on your newsletter mailing list.

4) Attend Regional and National network conferences, and communicate with your Regional Chairperson every other month concerning consumer input topics and consumer relations activities at your library.

5) Invite the Head of the Consumer Relations Section to attend a consumer advisory committee meeting and/or a staff consumer relations training session.

c. Internal

1) Schedule staff training sessions on handicapping conditions once every four months; arrange for three staff members to work at another agency serving the same population for a half-day each.

2) Invite handicapped staff from your library's parent agency to attend staff meetings and training sessions.

D. Regional Libraries with More than 15,000 Readers

The largest libraries in the NLS/network system, these libraries have an average of 27 staff positions; the largest has 36. These libraries can assign full responsibility for the consumer relations function to someone other than the librarian, and then delegate portions of that function to additional staff as with smaller libraries. Discussion of on-going consumer relations activities should be a regular part of weekly staff meetings.

1. Less than at present

a. External

1) Have at least two regularly scheduled consumer advisory committee meetings per year.

2) Have quarterly informal discussion and training sessions for the reader advisors, stressing the importance of the public relations aspects of their work. Include reader advisor supervisors.

3) Keep a log of all input, from both users and others, by broad subject categories. Review tabulated log data quarterly.

4) Have at least three professional staff attend a city, chapter, or statewide meeting of a consumer organization each quarter.

5) Have the reader advisors conduct three "mini-surveys" of readers when they call in book orders. Also conduct a telephone survey of 500 readers.

6) Send out a newsletter to all readers quarterly. Produce special media versions. Place the Consumer Relations Section at NLS on your newsletter mailing list.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS concerning your library's consumer relations activities and topics of interest as expressed by consumers, at least twice a year.

2) Respond fully to all items on the Annual Network Survey, enclosing with your response copies of your reader newsletter, updated new reader materials, etc.

3) Attend both biannual Regional and National network conferences, held in alternating years. Prepare for them in part by reviewing trends and topics in consumer input received by your library over the past year. Call your Regional Chairperson to discuss local and regional consumer issues quarterly.

c. Internal

1) Have quarterly general staff training sessions per year on the social, psychological, and other effects of handicapping conditions.

2) If appropriate, invite handicapped staff from your parent agency, or other appropriate state agency such as Governor's Advisory Council on the Handicapped to attend staff training sessions.

D. More than 15,000 Readers

2. Recommended/present level of resource commitment

a. External

1) Have regularly scheduled consumer advisory committee meetings quarterly.

2) Have reader advisor discussion and training sessions, at least quarterly. Be sure reader advisor supervisors are kept sensitive to public relations issues.

3) Log all user and public input, by subject categories. Review quarterly.

4) Have at least three professional staff attend local or state chapter meetings of a consumer organization regularly.

5) Have the reader advisors conduct four "mini-surveys" on various topics. In addition, conduct two telephone surveys of 200 readers each, and one mail-out survey to at least 1,500 readers.

6) Send out a newsletter quarterly. Produce special media versions.

7) Update new reader materials at least annually.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS quarterly to discuss consumer related topics.

2) Send a sample copy of your most recent newsletter, and other locally developed materials, along with your completed Annual Network Survey form each year.

3) Attend both Regional and National network conferences; discuss consumer input and consumer issues with the Chairperson of your Regional conference every two months.

4) Invite the head of the Consumer Relations Section to attend a consumer advisory committee meeting and/or staff consumer relations training session.

c. Internal

1) Have staff training on handicapping conditions every other month.

2) Invite handicapped staff from your parent agency or other appropriate state agency to attend training sessions.

II. REGIONAL LIBRARIES (cont'd)

D. More than 15,000 Readers

3. More resources than present

a. External

1) Hold regularly scheduled consumer advisory committee meetings every other month. Pay travel expenses to enable at least two consumers from distant parts of the state to attend. Determine the feasibility of holding these meetings via telephone conference call.

2) Have discussion and training sessions with the reader advisors every other month, including their supervisors. Occasionally monitor calls from users to assure that reader advisors are relating to readers properly.

3) Log and tabulate all consumer input received, whether by mail, phone or other means; review these logs quarterly and discuss the major consumer interest areas they identify with your staff, your Regional Chairperson and the Consumer Relations Section at NLS. Determine whether this input can be formatted in a manner that would permit entering it by computer to a central consumer input data file at NLS on a regular basis.

4) Update new reader materials biannually.

5) Have at least three professional staff attend city, state, or other chapter meetings of consumer organizations regularly.

6) Have reader advisors conduct four "mini-surveys" during the year; also conduct four telephone surveys of 200 readers and one mail-out survey of at least 1,500 readers.

7) Send out a newsletter to readers quarterly. Provide special media versions.

8) For any reader who transfers from your library to another library in the network, call or write to them at their new home sixty days after they apply for a transfer to make sure their new library has started service. If not contact the library.

b. Intramural

1) Write or call the Consumer Relations Section at NLS every other month to discuss consumer input and consumer relations activities at your library and elsewhere in the network.

2) Send any locally produced materials along with your completed Annual Network Survey forms.

3) Have the Consumer Relation Section at NLS on your newsletter mailing list.

4) Attend Regional and National network conferences and communicate with your Regional Chairperson every other month concerning input topics and consumer relations activities at your library.

5) Invite the Head of the Consumer Relations Section to attend a consumer advisory committee meeting and/or a staff consumer relations training session.

c. Internal

1) Schedule staff training sessions on handicapping conditions once every other month; arrange for four staff members to work at another agency serving the same population for a half-day each.

2) Invite handicapped staff from your library's parent agency to attend staff meetings and training sessions.

III. SUBREGIONAL LIBRARIES

Subregional libraries on average have only two staff positions each; at such a low level of staffing few formal consumer relations activities are possible in addition to normal circulation functions. However, in many ways these libraries are "closest" to the consumer; they are urged to conduct as many of the following consumer relations activities as possible.

A. Less than at present

1. External

   a) Have at least one consumer advisory committee meeting sometime during the year.

   b) Have informal discussion and training sessions for the reader advisors, stressing the importance of the public relations aspects of their work, at least twice a year.

   c) Keep a log of all input, from both users and others, by broad subject categories.

   d) Attend at least one meeting of the local chapter of a consumer organization such as the National Association of the Physically Handicapped, the American Council of the Blind, or the National Federation of the Blind.

   e) Have the reader advisor do a "mini-survey" of readers when they call in book orders, twice a year.

   f) Send out a newsletter to all readers at least once a year.

2. Intramural

   a) Send your Regional library copies of any updated locally produced materials, and your newsletter.

   b) Send a sample copy of your newsletter to NLS once a year. Exchange newsletters with at least three other Subregional libraries during the year.

3. Internal

   a) Have at least one formal staff training session per year on the social, psychological, and other effects of handicapping conditions.

   b) Invite handicapped staff from other local agencies to attend staff training sessions.

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B. Recommended/present level of resource commitment

1. External

   a) Have at least two consumer advisory committee meetings per year. Announce plans to have these meetings regularly scheduled in the future.

   b) Have reader advisor discussion and training sessions twice a year.

   c) Log all user and public input, by subject categories.

   d) Attend local consumer organization meetings quarterly.

   e) Have the reader advisors conduct two "mini-surveys" during the year, on various topics.

   f) Send out a newsletter at least once every four months.

2. Intramural

   a) Send a sample copy of your most recent newsletter and other locally developed materials to NLS as well as to your Regional library.

   b) Discuss consumer input and consumer issues with your Regional librarian every month.

3. Internal

   a) Have two staff training sessions on handicapping conditions per year.

   b) Invite handicapped staff from other appropriate local agencies to attend training sessions.

C. More resources than present

1. External

   a) Have at least one consumer advisory committee meeting every three months. Announce plans to meet regularly.

   b) Have discussion and training sessions with the reader advisors at least every four months.

   c) Log and tabulate all consumer input received, whether by mail, phone or other means: review these logs quarterly and discuss the major consumer interest areas they identify with your staff and your Regional librarian.

   d) Attend two local meetings of consumer organizations at least every other month.

   e) Have reader advisors conduct three "mini-surveys" during the year.

   f) Send out a newsletter to readers quarterly.

2. Intramural

   a) Have the Consumer Relations Stection at NLS on your newsletter mailing list.

   b) Attend Regional conferences. Communicate with your own Regional librarian every month concerning consumer input topics and consumer relations activities at your library.

3. Internal

   a) Schedule staff training sessions on handicapping conditions once every three or four months.

   b) Invite handicapped staff from other appropriate local agencies to attend staff meetings and training sessions.

IV. OTHER NETWORK AGENCIES

Network agencies other than Regional and Subregional libraries play a definite if lesser role in consumer relations. They do receive consumer input, and it is of value to the NLS/network system to see that this input is heeded. Accordingly, while no structured activities to interact with readers are recommended here for these agencies, it is important for the operators of deposit and demonstration collections, machine lending agencies, and multistate centers to specifically include consumer relations information in reports to their appropriate Regional library and/or NLS. CMLS should tabulate number of requests referred. Much reader feedback is received by this facility although it has no programmatic role, simply because many mailings are sent out from this location. Reader input at deposit collection locations is important since these facilities normally have little interaction with the rest of the network once the collection has been established. They should not be left out of the consumer affairs information loop. Demonstration collections by their very nature generate reader feedback; this input should be noted, reported and responded to.

V. CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a compendium of consumer relations activities, arranged to address the situations of various network agency types and sizes, as well as resource availability situations. Many possible activities for each location can be identified in addition to those included in this directory; many libraries will develop and offer activities and procedures in addition to those contained herein. The combined resulting program of consumer relations activities at every network library will make for a fuller, richer opportunity for readers to be involved in, and thus effectively served by, their NLS network library.

Chapter VI - Consumer Input Procedures Manual

I. INTRODUCTION

This manual has been developed as part of an overall effort to support consumer relations activities at NLS and network libraries. In 1981, a Consumer Relations Section was established at NLS to help coordinate this function, and a contractor was retained to review NLS/network consumer relations activities, develop a broad plan for the entire effort, and develop resource materials to assist network agencies. This workbook is part of the latter component, and contains a description of three major types of consumer relations activities. A sample reader survey questionnaire and a set of advisory committee bylaws are provided as well. There is one key point to remember in planning any consumer relations activity or developing an overall library consumer relations plan:

INVOLVE CONSUMERS IN DESIGNING CONSUMER RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

Only the readers can tell the library how useful and appropriate its services are, and how it should seek user feedback. Further, consumers provide a valuable source of comment from potential recipients on proposed changes in library procedures. Consumer relations activities sponsored by the library should provide the library with reader feedback on a broad range of topics, from a broad cross-section of consumers, on an ongoing basis. The three activities discussed in this manual are designed, in concert, to accomplish this.

Surveys of readers, on a periodic basis, provide information on a variety of topics from a documentably representative cross-section of readers. Consumer input meetings can provide the library with much greater depth of input, from a small number of readers but of no less validity. Staff training can assure that readers' views are solicited on an ongoing basis during routine contacts with the library to assure monitoring of ever-changing attitudes and needs.

Libraries at both Regional and Subregional levels need to maintain consumer relations programs, so that they receive these kinds of consumer input and more. Libraries are by definition responsive. In the unusually complex NLS/network system, the sensitivity to and responsiveness toward the needs of the readers is paramount for the program to continue to succeed.

II. READER SURVEYS

Introduction

Reader surveys are a very useful way of accomplishing several goals. They both bring to the library's attention areas of concern to readers, and they let readers know of the library's interest in their views. The key to the value of surveys is that only a small percentage of readers need be surveyed to reasonably represent the responses of the entire readership if certain procedures are observed.

Identifying Information Desired

The most important step in conducting a survey is the first -- what is to be collected? By clearly stating what is to be collected, it will be evident what other things must be left out, since the questionnaire cannot be too long. Wording of the questions is very important, as respondents may misunderstand the question. Consumer input can be very important at this stage -- reviewing proposed questionnaire items at a consumer advisory group meeting, for example, can help identify and prioritize important topics. In addition, their input in other aspects of the survey, such as the choice of format(s) and the plan for sharing, and making use of, the resulting findings should be built into the design of any such reader contact activity.

Selecting a Data Collection Method

Many libraries have performed mailed-out surveys of their readers in the past. Much of the value of the information obtained by mail-out surveys can be obtained at less expense by telephone, although assurance of confidentiality of responses is lost. Mailing, printing, and special media production expenses are avoided, although staff time and telephone charges are incurred. There are two types of surveys that can be conducted by telephone, active and passive surveys. An active survey is conducted much like a mailed-out survey, in that a sample of names is selected, using the statistical methods described above. Persons selected are called and asked the questions in the interview outline, and their responses are tabulated.

The passive form of telephone surveying can be useful if the library receives a considerable portion of its book orders from readers by telephone. A period of time can be identified over which it is likely that a broad range of readers can be expected to call, such as a month or six weeks. Then, during such a period, every reader who calls in is asked, after the book order is taken, a brief series of questions. The responses are recorded and tabulated, and the findings can generally be regarded as representative. Passive telephone surveys assume that most readers order by telephone, and that the length of time over which most types of readers can be expected to call in can be predicted.

Too, this method excludes readers who do not call in their book orders. The survey results will not fairly represent these readers' views, and will give no clues as to what these views might be.

Traditionally, the greatest amount of information can only be obtained through use of a mailed-out questionnaire. If it has been more than a year since a general survey of reader attitudes and interests has been performed, the number of topics on which the library may wish to ask reader opinion may be quite large. On the other hand, readers may feel somewhat imposed upon if asked to respond to a lengthy questionnaire that asks the same questions as a prior one not long before. Shorter telephone surveys or brief mail-out questionnaires are useful in the interim between larger mailed-out surveys; performing short and lengthy surveys in alternating years is one recommended plan.

As most of the readers of the NLS/network system are blind or visually impaired, the traditional printed questionnaire form with answer blanks and boxes to be checked is inappropriate, although many readers can use large print forms. It cannot be assumed that all readers will be able to ask for personal assistance in reading and filling in a questionnaire. One approach to these limitations is to produce the questionnaire in large type, and to provide at the outset a notice in braille, attached to the survey form, inviting the reader to call the toll-free 800 number maintained by the library for assistance, both by having the questions read aloud, and in recording responses. Thus, this message is communicated, either in braille or as it appears on the front page of the large-type questionnaire itself, to all recipients. This approach avoids the expense of multi-copy braille questionnaire production, yet is usable by nearly all readers.

Developing the Questionnaire/Interview Outline

Choosing between telephone and mail-out formats requires some idea of the amount of information desired; this in turn determines the range of topics that can be covered. In general, a survey must collect both content information and sampling information. Sampling information refers to facts about the respondent, so that it can be determined how many questionnaires were collected from each of the different types of respondents -- age group, male/female, media preferred, and so forth -- and thus how representative of the larger readership this surveyed group actually is.

This information is often asked at the end of the questionnaire. It should be accompanied by assurance that results will be kept confidential. Even where name is not asked, it is possible that identity could be determined in other ways; readers are ethically entitled to know that their responses will only be used for the purposes indicated. The library should take appropriate steps to protect the response records during tabulation, and to destroy them thereafter, if confidentiality is promised. While obtaining the respondents' name is usually avoided, some libraries may wish to identify respondents, so that any problems cited in the responses to the questions can be resolved on an individual basis.

Many areas of library operations can be covered in the content questions sections of the instrument, including book/magazine recommendations. Consumer input is of use in designing this section. It is, in addition, always useful to have a section at the end of the questionnaire that asks for general, overall rating of the program, and for suggestions. A questionnaire is presented in Appendix A to this chapter as an example of a thorough, mail-out user survey. It includes general questions on library operations, as well as sampling questions. It has been pre-tested on a group of NLS/network program patrons and refined. It is designed to be augmented or reduced depending on the needs of particular libraries.

Requirements of Sample Size

Enough responses must be received to provide useful data for all items on the form. There is a statistical procedure for doing this, as follows:

1) Estimate the expected response rate. That is, if 100 questionnaires are sent out, how many will be returned? This ratio determines how many questionnaires to send out in order for an adequate amount of data to be returned.

2) Review how many kinds of readers there will be. This refers to basic characteristics of readers -- age, sex, media used. These categories each contain a number of possible responses -- male/female, age group, etc. -- each must be specified. Multiplying these by each other provides the total number of different kinds of readers needed to reach to approximate a true sampling of all reader types. There should be enough readers' names selected into the sample so that at least 30 fall into each category of the above types; every reader will represent several categories, of course.

3) Therefore the sample of readers to which the questionnaire should be mailed is approximately the number of respondent types times this minimum size of 30 per type.

4) Finally, in planning the actual printing and mailing of questionnaires, add an additional amount based on the expected non-response rate. The total number, divided by total readership, constitutes the sampling proportion (1/50th, 1/3, etc.).

Requirements of Sample Selection

The selection of which readers are to receive a survey must be either truly random, which is a statistical procedure using random number tables, or rigidly systematic. Either way, it must be done according to a plan that does not give some readers a better chance to be included than others. To sample systematically, starting with an arbitrarily picked number between zero and the denominator of the sampling proportion, such as 10 if a 1/10th sample is planned, select every 10th name from the master list of all the readers. Names themselves should not be considered in selecting potential respondents. Only if the sample is chosen in an unbiased manner can the responses be assumed to represent the view of the entire readership. This adherence to basic procedures of surveying is necessary throughout the entire survey development process in order for the results to be valid.

Libraries will need to determine their own arrangements for the mailing out, receiving/logging, and tabulating results of surveys.

III. CONSUMER ADVISORY GROUP MEETINGS

User service feedback is vital for a library to effectively serve its readers. To receive this input, many network libraries have formed consumer advisory groups. These groups not only tell the library how useful and appropriate its services are, but also promote an increase in public awareness of NLS facilities and services, help establish priorities for future expansion of services, encourage the efforts of volunteers in service to users, and provide valuable comments regarding the development of new equipment and materials. This input, although clearly advisory to the library's own decision making process, is critically important to it.

The degree of formality of consumer advisory input sessions varies considerably, ranging from open meetings announced through the newsletter where all readers are invited to come and speak to the group on any topics concerning library operations, to regular meetings of a formal consumer advisory panel comprised of members who serve rotating terms, are well versed in parliamentary procedures, and adhere to a prepared agenda. Whichever format is used, meetings should be held on a regular, announced basis, rather than "as needed."

Participation of the local chapters of the American Council of the Blind, the National Federation of the Blind, the National Association of the Physically Handicapped, the Blind Veterans Association, and other consumer organizations, on a formal, inter-organization basis, is a fundamental component of this process.

Open Forum Meetings

Open forum meetings can be held in different parts of the state each time, if resources and facilities can be arranged. This reduces the problem of access for many readers, resulting in input from a more diverse group than would otherwise be possible.

Open forum meetings should be announced at least three months in advance, in the newsletter and when book orders are taken. Consumer organizations like American Council of the Blind, the National Federation of the Blind, and others should be specifically contacted and asked to send a representative. Readers better known to the library can be asked to help identify others who might be willing to attend, and to determine transportation assistance needs.

Standing Consumer Advisory Committees

Libraries often prefer to have a panel of consumers identified, rather than just hold periodic open meetings, for ongoing structured input purposes as well as rapid informal polling of consumer opinions as is often desired.

Such panels should be representative cross-sections of all readers -- visually impaired, physically handicapped, blind, young, old, men, women, and so forth -- so that no groups of readers are excluded from being represented. An announcement in the newsletter asking for volunteers to serve on such a panel should be made, readers known to the library asked to nominate members, and letters requesting nominations of program users from other local service agencies, and consumer groups sent out.

The variety of readers needed should thus be possible to obtain by reviewing all responses. Enough names must be collected to replace those nominated readers who do not wish to participate. Consumer groups, however, should be specifically recruited.

Travel difficulties are compounded by the fact that many readers may live over a hundred miles from their libraries, normally conducting business by telephone and mail. To avoid geographical bias in the committee makeup, libraries should attempt if at all possible to set aside funds to pay the travel expenses for readers in far away parts of the service area to travel to the meetings. Advance announcement of this may encourage readers from distant sites, and help to keep the group from being made up of only readers living in and around the city where the library is located. If such compensation is not possible, readers from other parts of the state who are willing to contribute the time and expense to participate in such an input committee on their own should be particularly encouraged.

Meeting Planning

Planning meetings for either open-forum-type meetings or standing committee meetings requires identifying appropriate meeting facilities and reserving far enough in advance so that notice of the place and time of the meeting can be included in the announcement in the newsletter(s) sent out during the preceding months.

Facilities

Meeting facilities should include a main meeting room with seating for fifty; an anteroom for registration, arrivals, conversation, and so forth; barrier-free access (first floor meeting rooms where possible); and convenient washroom facilities.* Meeting planning should include a period for arrival and registration, and breaks. Light refreshments can be made available if resources permit.

The meeting environment should convey an atmosphere of a working group of like-minded persons, rather than a hearing or grievance process. This can be enhanced through group introductions, a circular seating arrangement rather than classroom style, offering refreshments, and, most importantly, open discusssion of any point brought up by a reader. This should include soliciting comments from participants who have not spoken on a point, asking the group what action it would like the library to take on an issue, and establishing before moving on to another point an approximate timetable or date by which some action can be expected. The action could be reported on in a future newsletter, or at a particular future month's advisory board meeting.

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* The library itself may be a suitable location, if there is a large open area with adequate seating, free of mail-handling and other large equipment. Conference rooms elsewhere in the building, or local school facilities, can also be readily reserved at little or no charge.

Officers

In a standing Consumer Advisory Committee, the first meetings should be concerned with establishment of structure. Frequency of meetings, nomination and election of Chairperson, Secretary, and other officers, including terms of office and specification of duties, should be the first order of business. These and other operating parameters should then be compiled into a set of bylaws for the committee. A suggested set of bylaws, developed by NLS, is included as Appendix B to this chapter in order to illustrate the importance of this founding document.

Agenda

At open forum meetings agendas should be limited to opening remarks followed by questions and discussion for as long a time as is necessary.

Standing Consumer Advisory Committees, however, should have very clear agendas, and these should be developed and shared in the advance announcments of the meetings. If there are particular matters the library staff want to learn consumers' views on, time should be provided for this as well. Agenda planning should be the responsibility of the Chairperson in consultation with the librarian. (It is important that the committee recognize its independence as a group, including, if desired, meeting in session without library staff present. Meetings should be run by the committee; the library staff are the beneficiaries.) A suggested agenda is as follows:

- Welcome; Opening remarks - Chairman
- Reading and approval of minutes of last meeting
- Reports from Officers and Committees
- Old business; New business
- Comments from Readers; Discussion
- Discussion/Response/Questions from the Library Staff
- Summarization and Closing Remarks

The expected length of the meeting should be given in the initial mailed-out announcement, so that readers wishing to attend can plan transportation. It is important to stick to the planned closing time for this reason, and also so that readers will know that at future meetings this can be relied on. There will undoubtedly be those who wish to discuss certain points longer than others; it is the chair's responsibility to keep the meeting moving along so that all important matters can be brought up and all agenda items covered. Those having more to say can meet with the library staff after the meeting or on another occasion. The length may vary, given local preferences and by consensus, from a few hours to a full day for a typical meeting every few months.

Activities between meetings should not be limited to the library's follow-up actions. Participants should be encouraged to seek out other readers, ask their views (on any library-related matter, not just those discussed in the meeting); share announcements of meetings and upcoming schedules, and encourage others to attend. They should be urged to convey to consumer organizations the information discussed at the meeting, and to invite additional representatives of those organizations to attend, particularly if they are users of the NLS/network library program.

Scheduling

Scheduling of meetings should be something the group participates in. Holding the first meeting, however, or selecting a time for open forum meetings, must be the librarian's choice (this could be a subject for a "mini-survey" of readers calling in to order books). Evening transportation and attentiveness concerns suggest a daytime scheduling. The degree to which holding the meeting during working hours discriminates against employed readers can vary; one solution is weekend meetings.

Conclusion

Consumer advisory group meetings are the best way to obtain ongoing, structured, group input from consumers in a personable, shared manner. A regular, formalized input process can bring to the library's attention a broad range of issues and perspectives on a regular basis. All meetings should be reported in the earliest subsequent newsletter that goes to all readers, as well as announcing the next meeting place, date and time. In this manner, all readers, not just those who can attend, can be kept involved in the consumer-library communications process.

IV. STAFF TRAINING

The most thorough form of consumer relations is the ongoing work of the library. Every interaction with a reader, whether by telephone, mail, or in person, is an element of consumer relations. Accordingly, all staff who have contact with the readers should be aware of the importance of not merely being courteous and helpful while taking book orders or listening to a problem, but of being receptive to the concerns of readers calling or writing in. This involves both being solicitous while talking with the reader -- accurately understanding a problem, identifying other factors which may underlie the immediate problem, such as incorrect specification of titles, a problem with the mailing list entry, etc. -- and conveying information of importance in the general consumer relations arena to one's supervisor for action and/or logging.

To establish and reinforce in the minds of the staff who deal with the readers the concept that each call and each letter is a component of an overall aspect of library operations called consumer relations, a series of staff training and discussion meetings can be helpful. These need not be lengthy, yet should be held frequently enough to reinforce the concept and train new staff in this area. They should convey the importance of noting the concerns of readers expressed in each contact.

These staff meetings can also be used to debrief the staff concerning general issues readers have raised since the last such meeting, particularly those that are not normally passed on to supervisors. Holding these meetings for one half hour monthly can accomplish both objectives. At the same time, the staff can be instructed on how to respond to consumer relations-related inquiries; changes regarding topics that should be referred to other staff for handling; and those items typical of weekly meetings, but focused on only issues dealing with the elements of consumer relations.

Readers should think of the library as a responsive, helpful agency. By far the key factor in fostering this perception is the manner in which routine contacts are handled, not how particular problems were solved. Sensitivity training can help assure that these contacts support this objective, while improving the library's operations by identifying problem areas in a pleasant, supportive way.

V. CONCLUSION

This chapter, and the two preceding it, has been designed to constitute a "handbook" for use by network agencies in understanding and planning consumer relation activities. They have presented the rationales, methods and aspects of several of the main means for obtaining consumer input. There are no doubt countless others; each library's setting and resources are known best to itself, and local consumer relations activities can best be designed locally. However, every library should make use of surveys, consumer advisory groups, and staff training to assure both breadth and depth in consumer input obtained, and to stay on top of consumer issues, which may change rapidly over time.

It is important to bear in mind that the objective of consumer relations is responsiveness. Two components are necessary to assure this. One is a battery of ways by which the consumer's voice can be heard, so that no message goes unheeded, and the other is clear internal channels for the routing of and reacting to these concerns, including referrals by staff within the library and by libraries within the network.

NLS maintains a dynamic service that is constantly improving and adjusting as needs change and opportunities arise for improvements. The network librarian is the key receiver of consumer input in the network and must pass the word along if optimum responsiveness in the system is to be maintained. The Consumer Relations Section at NLS serves as the clearinghouse for receiving information on and supporting NLS responses to general consumer concerns. The role of the network librarian in both obtaining and transmitting consumer views is key to this effort.

APPENDIX A TO CHAPTER VI

This Appendix presents a suggested Reader Survey Questionnaire. It covers a wide range of reader-library relations topics, but individual libraries are nevertheless urged to delete, add, modify, or replace questions or sections as appropriate to their situations. Some questions or groups of questions may be of particular interest to a library for a particular purpose; these items could be expanded to cover the matter more thoroughly. There must be some limits to the depth with which each area is explored, to keep the final questionnaire from being excessively long.

It is very important in surveying that respondents either be assured confidentiality of their responses, by steps taken to protect their answers from unauthorized use, or not. Librarians should consider the practicality of protection of data before deciding whether they are able to include this assurance (which could yield more candid and thus useful responses). Lockable cabinets are one way to provide security physically; staff working with the forms, and how they are handled, must be closely monitored as well.

Even if confidentiality is promised, libraries may want to enable readers to identify themselves who, in the course of responding to the items in the questionnaire, wish to make a very specific complaint. These respondents can be encouraged to send in the details of the matter for individualized, immediate action, without compromising the confidentiality of their responses, by having them send in the specifics separate from the questionnaire.

READER SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

(Attach Braille strip giving invitation to call 800 number here.)

READER SURVEY
BY THE

____
REGIONAL LIBRARY IN COOPERATION WITH THE
NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE FOR THE BLIND AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED

ALL RESPONSES WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.
CALL 800-___-____ IF YOU WISH ASSISTANCE IN READING OR RESPONDING TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

IF YOU HAVE NOT REQUESTED OR RECEIVED BOOKS OR MAGAZINES FROM YOUR REGIONAL LIBRARY IN THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS, PLEASE CHECK HERE ☐ AND RETURN THE QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE ATTACHED POSTAGE PAID ENVELOPE. THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO DO THIS.

1.A. HOW LONG AGO DID YOU SIGN UP FOR SERVICE AT THIS LIBRARY?

LESS THAN ONE YEAR .... ☐
1 - 3 YEARS .... ☐
4 - 6 YEARS .... ☐
7 - 9 YEARS .... ☐
10 YEARS OR MORE ...... ☐

(GO TO QUESTION 2)

1.B. WHEN YOU SIGNED UP, DID YOU HAVE ANY DIFFICULTY ESTABLISHING YOUR ELIGIBILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM?

YES .... ☐
NO .... ☐
DON'T RECALL ...... ☐

2.A. DO YOU USUALLY CONTACT THE LIBRARY:

BY TELEPHONE? .... ☐
BY MAIL? .... ☐
BY GOING THERE? .... ☐
BY ASKING SOMEONE ELSE TO DO IT? ... ☐

2.B. WHEN YOU CONTACT THE LIBRARY, ARE THEY RECEPTIVE TO YOUR NEEDS AND HELPFUL IN TAKING ORDERS FOR THE BOOKS YOU WANT?

ALWAYS ....☐
USUALLY ....☐
SOMETIMES..........☐
NEVER ....☐

2.C. HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU USUALLY CONTACT THE LIBRARY?

MORE THAN ONCE A MONTH ....☐
6 - 11 TIMES A YEAR ....☐
3 - 5 TIMES A YEAR ....☐
1 - 2 TIMES A YEAR ....☐
LESS ....☐

3.A. DO YOU USUALLY:

TELL THE LIBRARY WHAT BOOKS YOU WANT? ....☐(GO TO QUESTION 4)
HAVE THE LIBRARY SELECT BOOKS FOR YOU? ......☐

3.B. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THEIR SELECTIONS?

ALWAYS ....☐
USUALLY ....☐
SOMETIMES ....☐
NEVER ....☐

4.A. (LIBRARY: CHOOSE AS APPROPRIATE AND REPLACE WORDING:) YOUR LIBRARY[SENDS A FIXED NUMBER OF BOOKS TO A READER EACH MONTH/SENDS BOOKS ONLY WHEN SOME ARE RETURNED/SENDS BOOKS ONLY WHEN A READER REQUESTS THEM.] WOULD YOU PREFER A DIFFERENT METHOD?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
NO OPINION ....☐

4.B. IF YES, PLEASE DESCRIBE:

5. DO YOU THINK THE COLLECTION CONTAINS SUFFICIENT MATERIALS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL OR STUDENT READER?

NO OPINION .... ☐
YES .... ☐
NO .... ☐

6.A. DO YOU THINK THE LIBRARY CONTAINS ENOUGH SERIOUS AS WELL AS POPULAR NONFICTION?

NO OPINION .... ☐
YES .... ☐
NO .... ☐

6.B. DO YOU THINK THE LIBRARY CONTAINS ENOUGH SERIOUS AS WELL AS POPULAR FICTION?

NO OPINION .... ☐
YES .... ☐
NO .... ☐

7. FOR THE FOLLOWING SUBJECT AREAS, PLEASE INDICATE WHETHER YOU THINK THE LIBRARY HAS TOO MANY BOOKS, ABOUT THE RIGHT NUMBER, OR TOO FEW FOR YOUR INTERESTS.

	TOO MANY NOW	ABOUT RIGHT	MORE NEEDED	NO OPINION/ DON'T READ
NONFICTION:				
CURRENT EVENTS & COMMENTARY	☐	☐	☐	☐
SPORTS	☐	☐	☐	☐
BIBLE AND RELIGION	☐	☐	☐	☐
PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIOLOGY, & PERSONAL GROWTH	☐	☐	☐	☐
DO-IT-YOURSELF MANUALS, COOKBOOKS, REFERENCE, ETC...	☐	☐	☐	☐
BUSINESS	☐	☐	☐	☐
NATURE & TRAVEL	☐	☐	☐	☐
SCIENCE	☐	☐	☐	☐
HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY.........	☐	☐	☐	☐
SCHOOL BOOKS & TEXTS	☐	☐	☐	☐
FICTION:				
POETRY	☐	☐	☐	☐
PLAYS	☐	☐	☐	☐
HUMOR	☐	☐	☐	☐
SHORT STORIES	☐	☐	☐	☐
SCIENCE FICTION	☐	☐	☐	☐
MYSTERIES	☐	☐	☐	☐
WESTERNS	☐	☐	☐	☐
CHILDREN'S BOOKS	☐	☐	☐	☐
BEST SELLERS	☐	☐	☐	☐
CURRENT NOVELS	☐	☐	☐	☐
CLASSIC/HISTORICAL NOVELS..	☐	☐	☐	☐
ROMANCE	☐	☐	☐	☐

8.A. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE NUMBER OF PERIODICALS AVAILABLE?

NO OPINION .....☐
YES ....☐
NO ....☐

8.B. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE VARIETY OF PERIODICALS AVAILABLE?

NO OPINION .....☐
YES ....☐
NO ....☐

9.A. THE BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF FICTION BOOKS IN TALKING BOOK TOPICS, BRAILLE BOOK REVIEW AND THE CATALOGS INDICATE IF A BOOK CONTAINS STRONG LANGUAGE, VIOLENCE, OR DESCRIPTIONS OF SEX. DO YOU THINK THIS NOTIFICATION IS USEFUL?

NO OPINION .....☐
YES ....☐
NO ....☐

9.B. IF NO, WHY? ______________________________

10. THERE ARE SEVERAL SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND SUBJECT CONCENTRATIONS OFFERED BY THE LIBRARY. PLEASE INDICATE THOSE WHICH YOU ARE AWARE OF, AND WHICH YOU READ BOOKS FROM, IF KNOWN.

	AWARE OF?		READ FROM?		NOT SURE
	YES	NO	YES	NO	
MUSIC	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
YOUNG PERSONS	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
CHILDREN'S PRINT/BRAILLE	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
FOREIGN LANGUAGE	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11.A. (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY) DO YOU USE:

FLEXIBLE DISCS? ....☐
CASSETTE TAPES? ....☐
BRAILLE? ....☐
LARGE PRINT? ....☐

11.B. WHICH DO YOU MOST PREFER USING?

FLEXIBLE DISCS .... ☐
CASSETTE TAPES ....☐
BRAILLE ....☐
LARGE PRINT ....☐

THE NEXT THREE SECTIONS REFER TO RECORDED VOICE, BRAILLE, AND LARGE PRINT MATERIALS SEPARATELY, TO REQUEST YOUR COMMENTS ON EACH OF THESE. FILL OUT THE SECTIONS THAT APPLY ONLY TO THE TYPE OF MATERIALS YOU USE, AND THEN PROCEED TO QUESTION 12.

SECTION A: FOR USERS OF FLEXIBLE DISCS AND CASSETTE TAPES.

A-1.A. DO YOU HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS WITH RECEIVING RECORDED MATERIALS ON A REGULAR BASIS?

	YES	NO
MATERIALS ARRIVED LATE	☐	☐
ORDERED MATERIALS NOT RECEIVED	☐	☐
MATERIALS DAMAGED IN MAIL	☐	☐
MATERIALS NOT DELIVERED BY POST OFFICE	☐	☐
OTHER (PLEASE DESCRIBE):	☐	☐

A-1.B. DO YOU HAVE ANY PROBLEMS WITH THE FOLLOWING IN RETURNING MATERIALS TO THE LIBRARY?

	YES	NO
REPACKAGING MATERIALS	☐	☐
HAVING MAIL PICKED UP	☐	☐
FITTING MATERIALS IN MAIL BOX	☐	☐
OTHER (PLEASE DESCRIBE):	☐	☐

____

A-2.A. DOES YOUR LIBRARY USE VOLUNTEERS TO WORK WITH READERS?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐ } (GO TO QUESTION A-3)
DON'T KNOW ....☐ }

A-2.B. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THEIR SERVICES?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW ....☐
DOES NOT APPLY.☐
NO OPINION ....☐

A-3. DO YOU EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS WITH THE USE OR MAINTENANCE OF THE CASSETTE AND/OR DISC PLAYERS?

YES ....☐
SOMETIMES .....☐
NO ....☐

A-4.A. DO YOU EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS IN READING BOOKS ON CASSETTE?

YES ....☐
SOMETIMES .....☐
NO ....☐

A-4.B. DO YOU EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS IN READING BOOKS ON DISC?

YES .... ☐
SOMETIMES ..... ☐
NO .... ☐

A-5. HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE VOICES OF THE NARRATORS OF BOOKS ON CASSETTE AND DISC?

ALWAYS .... ☐
USUALLY .... ☐
SOMETIMES ..... ☐
NEVER .... ☐

SECTION B: FOR USERS OF BRAILLE

B-1.A. DO YOU HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS WITH RECEIVING BRAILLE MATERIALS ON A REGULAR BASIS?

	YES	NO
MATERIALS ARRIVE LATE	☐	☐
MAIL NOT PICKED UP	☐	☐
MATERIALS DAMAGED IN MAIL	☐	☐
MATERIALS NOT DELIVERED BY POST OFFICE	☐	☐
OTHER (PLEASE DESCRIBE):	☐	☐

B-1.B. DO YOU HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS IN RETURNING MATERIALS TO THE LIBRARY?

	YES	NO
REPACKAGING MATERIALS	☐	☐
MAIL NOT PICKED UP	☐	☐
WON'T FIT IN MAIL BOX	☐	☐
OTHER (PLEASE DESCRIBE):	☐	☐

B-2.A. DOES YOUR LIBRARY USE VOLUNTEERS TO WORK WITH READERS?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW ..☐

B-2.B. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THEIR SERVICES?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW ......☐
DOES NOT APPLY ..☐
NO OPINION ......☐

B-3. WOULD YOU LIKE MORE BOOKS AND MAGAZINES IN GRADE 1 BRAILLE?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW ..☐

B-4.A. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE NUMBER OF MATERIALS AVAILABLE IN BRAILLE FROM THE LIBRARY?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW ..☐

B-4.B. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE VARIETY OF MATERIALS AVAILABLE IN BRAILLE FROM THE LIBRARY?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW ..☐

B-5. DO YOU HAVE A PREFERENCE BETWEEN HAND-COPIED AND PRESS BRAILLE?

PREFER HAND-COPIED BRAILLE .....☐
PREFER PRESS BRAILLE ....☐
NO PREFERENCE ....☐

B-6. DO YOU EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS IN READING BRAILLE MATERIALS FROM THE LIBRARY?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
IF YES, PLEASE DESCRIBE: ______________________________

____

SECTION C: FOR USERS OF LARGE PRINT MATERIALS.

C-1.A. DO YOU HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS WITH RECEIVING MATERIALS ON A REGULAR BASIS?

	YES	NO
MATERIALS ARRIVE LATE	☐	☐
ORDERED MATERIALS NOT RECEIVED	☐	☐
MATERIALS DAMAGED IN MAIL	☐	☐
MATERIALS NOT DELIVERED BY POST OFFICE	☐	☐
OTHER (PLEASE DESCRIBE):	☐	☐

____

C-1.B. DO YOU HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS IN RETURNING MATERIALS TO THE LIBRARY?

	YES	NO
REPACKAGING MATERIALS	☐	☐
MAIL NOT PICKED UP	☐	☐
WON'T FIT IN MAIL BOX	☐	☐
OTHER (PLEASE DESCRIBE):	☐	☐

C-2.A. DOES YOUR LIBRARY USE VOLUNTEERS TO WORK WITH READERS?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW ..☐

C-2.B. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THEIR SERVICES?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW ....☐
DOES NOT APPLY ...☐
NO OPINION ....☐

C-3.A. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE NUMBER OF MATERIALS AVAILABLE IN LARGE PRINT FROM THE LIBRARY?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW ...☐

C-3.B. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE VARIETY OF MATERIALS AVAILABLE IN LARGE PRINT FROM THE LIBRARY?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW ...☐

C-4. DO YOU EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS IN READING BOOKS IN LARGE PRINT?

YES............☐
SOMETIMES ......☐
NO ....☐

THIS CONCLUDES THE THREE SECTIONS ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF MATERIALS. PLEASE ANSWER ALL OF THE REMAINING QUESTIONS.

12.A. DID YOU TRANSFER TO THIS REGIONAL LIBRARY FROM ANOTHER ONE IN THE LAST YEAR?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐ (GO TO QUESTION 13)

12.B. DID YOU HAVE ANY DIFFICULTY IN STARTING TO RECEIVE BOOKS AGAIN AFTER THE TRANSFER?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T RECALL ...☐

13.A. HAVE YOU IN THE LAST YEAR ASKED THE LIBRARY TO STOP SENDING YOU ONE OR MORE MAGAZINES YOU NO LONGER WANTED TO RECEIVE?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐ } (GO TO QUESTION 14)
DON'T RECALL ...☐ }

13.B. DID YOU CONTINUE TO RECEIVE IT ANYWAY?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW .....☐

14.A. HOW MANY TIMES IN THE LAST YEAR HAVE YOU RECEIVED A NEWSLETTER FROM THE LIBRARY YOU ORDER BOOKS FROM?

NONE ....☐ (GO TO QUESTION 15)
ONCE ....☐
TWICE ....☐
THREE TIMES ....☐
MORE THAN 3 ....☐
DON'T KNOW .....☐

14.B. WOULD YOU LIKE THE NEWSLETTER TO INCLUDE ARTICLES BY AND ABOUT THE LIBRARY'S READERS?

NO OPINION .....☐
YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DOES NOW ....☐

15.A. HAVE YOU REQUESTED INFORMATION FROM YOUR REGIONAL LIBRARY ON OTHER PROGRAMS FOR THE BLIND AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED IN THE LAST YEAR?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐ } (GO TO QUESTION 16)
DON'T RECALL ...☐ }

15.B. IF SO, DID THE INFORMATION MEET YOUR NEEDS?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T KNOW .....☐

16. HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN ANY ACTIVITIES SPONSORED BY YOUR LIBRARY IN THE PAST YEAR?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T RECALL ..☐

17. PRIOR TO THIS SURVEY, HAS THE LIBRARY ASKED FOR YOUR OPINIONS AND IDEAS IN THE PAST YEAR?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
DON'T RECALL ..☐

18. WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN A MEETING SPONSORED BY THE LIBRARY SOMETIME IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS?

YES ....☐
NO ....☐
NOT SURE ......☐

19. WHAT IS THE GREATEST FACTOR THAT COULD IMPEDE YOU FROM PARTICIPATING IN ACTIVITIES SPONSORED BY YOUR LIBRARY?

____

____

20. WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT YOUR LIBRARY AND ITS PROGRAM?

____

____

21. WHAT DO YOU LIKE LEAST ABOUT YOUR LIBRARY AND ITS PROGRAM?

____

____

22. OVERALL, ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE LIBRARY AND ITS PROGRAM?

QUITE SATISFIED ....☐
SATISFIED ....☐
NOT SATISFIED ....☐
IF YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED, YOU MAY MAKE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS HERE:

____

____

23. DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS TO MAKE TO YOUR LIBRARY FOR IMPROVEMENT IN ITS PROGRAM AND SERVICES?

____

____

____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP IN COMPLETING THIS SURVEY. PLEASE TAKE A FEW MINUTES MORE TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING BACKGROUND ITEMS, WHICH WILL HELP US IN USING THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY. ALL ANSWERS WILL BE KEPT PRIVATE. YOUR NAME IS NOT BEING RECORDED.

24.A. WHAT IS YOUR AGE? ____________

24.B. ARE YOU MALE OR FEMALE? ______________

24.C. ARE YOU:

WHITE .... ☐
BLACK .... ☐
HISPANIC .... ☐
OTHER .... ☐

24.D. ARE YOU:

BLIND .... ☐
VISUALLY HANDICAPPED....... ☐
PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED..... ☐
OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) .... ☐

____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH. PLEASE RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED.

APPENDIX B TO CHAPTER VI

SAMPLE BYLAWS

CONSUMER RELATIONS SECTION, NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE

ARTICLE I.

Name.

The name of this committee is the ______________________________ (full name of committee) of the ______________________________ (full name of library), which hereafter shall be referred to as the Committee and the Library, respectively.

ARTICLE II.

Purpose.

The purpose of this Committee is to give advice and make recommendations to the Library and, when appropriate, to the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress on practices, policies, and goals of library services to blind and physically handicapped individuals. The Committee shall further serve as an advocate for the promotion and further development of library services for all blind and physically handicapped individuals.

ARTICLE III.

Members.

SECTION 1. Membership on this Committee is representative of those organizations and individuals having a direct interest in library services to blind and physically handicapped persons.

SECTION 2. This Committee shall consist of no less than 10 members, of which at least 7 must be consumers.

SECTION 3. Members shall serve four-year terms:

A. Terms shall be so established that ½ of all terms shall expire every two years;

B. At the first Committee meeting, members shall draw lots to determine the length of their terms, ½ for two-year terms and ½ for four-year terms;

C. Thereafter, all persons appointed or elected to the Committee shall serve a term of four years.

SECTION 4. Membership shall consist of:

A. One representative from each major state and local organization of consumers (specify names of organizations);

B. One member from the commission or primary state agency for the blind, ____________________ (official name of body);

C. Two members appointed by the librarian; and

D. ________________________ (approximately 4 to 6) members-at-large.

SECTION 5. At least one member of the Committee shall be physically handicapped, and at least one member of the Committee shall be the parent of a child who is a Library user.

SECTION 6. Each member is expected to attend all meetings. After two consecutive unexcused absences, the seat shall be considered vacant.

SECTION 7. Each member, being present, shall have one vote. Library staff shall not vote, but shall serve as ex officio members of the Committee.

SECTION 8. Prior to the first meeting of the Committee, the members-at-large shall be selected by the staff of the Library. Thereafter, members-at-large shall be elected by the full Committee.

SECTION 9. Nomination of members-at-large:

A. Every two years, nominations will be solicited for members-at-large on the Committee;

B. Notices soliciting nominations for the Committee shall be publicized in the Library's newsletter and other area-wide publications directed towards blind and physically handicapped individuals, to ensure the same fair chance of knowing about the available seats on the Committee;

C. At least 30 days prior to the final meeting of the calendar year, all nominations must be received by the nominating committee;

D. The agencies and consumer organizations shall be contacted directly through their heads or presidents, who will submit the name of their representative.

SECTION 10. Election of members-at-large:

A. Each member shall receive the slate of nominees from the chairperson of the nominating committee, in writing, no less than 14 days prior to the election;

B. At the last meeting of the calendar year, the nominating committee shall present its slate of candidates for the election of members-at-large;

C. Nominations shall also be accepted from the floor at the time of the election;

D. Members-at-large shall be elected by a majority vote of all members present and voting at that meeting;

E. At the first meeting in the following calendar year the term for all new members shall begin;

F. No member shall be elected or appointed to more than two consecutive terms;

G. A member who has served more than half a term is considered to have served a full term.

SECTION 11. Vacancies:

A. A vacancy on the Committee by a member-at-large shall be filled by an election at the next regular meeting of the full Committee, provided the seat being vacated is not that of chairperson;

B. Vacancies which occur among agency or organizational representatives shall be filled by those groups.

ARTICLE IV.

Officers.

SECTION 1. There shall be elected from the membership the following officers: a chairperson; a vice-chairperson; and a secretary.

SECTION 2. The term of office shall run one year, from January 1 through December 31.

SECTION 3. After the first year, no person may hold office who has not been a member of the Committee for at least one year.

SECTION 4. Nomination and election of officers:

A. At least 30 days prior to the final meeting of each calendar year, nominations must be received by the nominating committee;

B. Each member shall receive the slate of candidates for office from the chairperson of the nominating committee, in writing, no less than 14 days prior to the election;

C. At the last meeting of each calendar year, the nominating committee shall present its slate of candidates for the election of officers;

D. Nominations are also accepted from the floor at the time of the election;

E. Officers are elected by a majority vote of all members present and voting at that meeting;

F. No officer may serve more than three consecutive terms in the same office;

G. An officer who has served more than half a term in the office is considered to have served a full term.

SECTION 4. Duties of the officers:

A. The officers shall perform the duties prescribed by these bylaws and by the parliamentary authority adopted by the Committee;

B. The chairperson shall preside at all meetings, appoint committees, and perform related duties;

C. The vice-chairperson, upon the absence of the chairperson, shall perform the duties of the chairperson and discharge other such duties as may from time to time be required;

D. The secretary shall be responsible for notifying members of meetings, taking minutes, distributing copies of minutes, in the appropriate format, to all members, and other related duties.

SECTION 5. The chairperson of the Committee and at least one other officer must be a Library user.

SECTION 6. Vacancies:

A. A vacancy in the office of the chairperson is filled immediately by the vice-chairperson. A new vice-chairperson shall be elected at the next regular meeting of the full Committee;

B. A vacancy in the office of vice-chairperson or secretary shall be filled by an election at the next regular meeting of the full Committee.

ARTICLE V.

Meetings.

SECTION 1. Regular meetings of the Committee shall be held at least four times each year.

SECTION 2. All meetings shall be held in a location which has facilities accessible to all persons, including those who are mobility impaired.

SECTION 3. The first meeting of each calendar year shall be held in ____________________ (location of Library). The location of all other meetings shall be determined by the members of the Committee.

SECTION 4. Special meetings may be called by the chairperson or at least three members of the Committee, provided that all members are notified at least seven days in advance of the special meeting.

SECTION 5. The agenda for each meeting shall be distributed to each member by the chairperson, in the appropriate format, no less than 14 days prior to each meeting.

SECTION 6. Fifty percent plus one member shall constitute a quorum for the purpose of conducting business.

SECTION 7. All meetings shall be open to anyone who wishes to observe.

ARTICLE VI.

Committees.

SECTION 1. The chairperson shall appoint the following standing committees: bylaws committee; nominating committee; and legislative committee.

A. The bylaws committee shall consider proposed amendments to the Committee's bylaws. The bylaws committee shall have the duty of presenting any proposed amendments to the members for deliberation and action;

B. The nominating committee, consisting of three members of the full Committee, shall present a slate of candidates to the membership, one nomination for each seat to be filled by election and one nomination for each officer;

C. The legislative committee shall keep the membership informed of all relevant Federal, State, and local legislation.

SECTION 2. Special committees may be appointed by the chairperson as needed.

SECTION 3. The chairperson shall be an ex officio member of all standing and special committees, except the nominating committee.

ARTICLE VII.

Parliamentary Authority.

The rules contained in the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Revised shall govern the Committee in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with these bylaws and any special rules of order the Committee may adopt.

ARTICLE VIII.

Amendment to the Bylaws.

These bylaws may be amended at any meeting by a two-thirds vote of those members present and voting, provided such amendment has been filed with the bylaws committee and distributed to all members, in the appropriate format, at least 30 days in advance of the meeting.

Adopted _______________(date of adoption)

Chapter VII - Managing the Flow of Consumer Information

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter draws on the consumer relations activities at NLS and network agencies as specified in prior chapters, and presents a design for coordinating the control and use of information received from consumers via these activities and from general public input.

The importance of monitoring consumer input has become increasingly recognized in recent years. In the Executive Branch of the Federal Government, it has been made a necessary component of the consumer relations programs that all agencies were required to establish pursuant to Executive Order No. 12160. The specific purpose addressed therein concerned logging and tracking of consumer complaints and complaint handling. As most correspondence with consumers generally centers around a problem or complaint of the consumers, this can be taken to refer to consumer input in general; it does not, however, refer to all public input.

One study of the efficacy of agency programs for complaint handling was performed for the Office of Consumer Affairs in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The report, Feasibility Study to Improve Handling of Consumer Complaints - Federal Agency Complaint Handling: Evaluation Update, written after the second wave of data collection of a four year study of 22 federal agencies, notes that while most agencies did not log, track or analyze consumer complaints at the time of the first wave in 1975-76, two-thirds had made improvements and were systematically performing complaint-handling functions by the second wave in 1978.* Commonly noted problem included the following:

- mail screening and routing by clerks not trained in consumer relations;
- logging of either none of the mail or all of the mail, although logging of only mail from consumers is needed in complaint handling;
- classification by categories other than those relevant to policymakers, impeding use of logs for review of consumer input by subject;
- use of form letters in response which provide little specific information on the consumer's particular problem; and
- lack of provisions for evaluation of the complaint handling system; lack of accountability for its operation.

Recommendations made in this report include the following:

- Statistical reports on the number and types of complaints received ... should be prepared. Senior policy makers should receive and review these reports ... at least quarterly.
- A consistent classification scheme for consumer complaints should be devised...

While the report focuses on the Executive Branch, its findings are transferable for use by other government agencies. Many of these findings were subsequently addressed in the Executive Order No. 12160, issued in 1980, requiring consumer relations programs to be established in all Executive Branch agencies. Some excerpts from the guidelines for establishing these programs include requirements that each agency develop procedures for:

- Logging in, in a standard format in accordance with standard topical categories, all complaints received by the agency including those received by telephone;

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* Technical Assistance Research Programs, Inc., Feasibility Study to Improve Handling of Consumer Complaints: Federal Agency Complaint Handling - Evaluation Update, T.A.R.P., Inc., Washington, D.C. 1978.

- Statistical reporting of complaints according to topical categories, and analysis of the patterns of issues raised and their implications for policymaking;
- Regular reports to key agency officials regarding the patterns and policy implications of the complaints received; and
- Evaluation of the agency's complaint handling system to assess the promptness and quality of agency responses.*

A final finding of the above mentioned complaint handling study concerned poor communications regarding consumer complaint handling between central and field or regional offices of many agencies, with the result that the field agencies do not place a properly high priority on the handling of consumer input.

A major point of this chapter is to address the gap in information flow regarding consumer input received between the consumer and NLS. While there exist avenues of communication between network librarians and NLS, these incorporate consumer interests in a non-systematic way, such as through furnishing copies of newsletters sent to readers or reporting on the number of consumer advisory committee meetings held in a given year. For true review and assessment of current consumer concerns, accurate collection of topical consumer input data must occur, and be reported through the network to NLS.

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* "Guidelines for Implementing the Consumer"s Executive Order," Memorandum, October 4, 1979, reprinted in Federal Register, June 19, 1980. p. 38818.

II. CONSUMER INPUT INFORMATION FLOW IN THE NLS/NETWORK SYSTEM

Currently, consumer or reader input is received at many points in the NLS/network system. This input may include comments and suggestions, materials and equipment requests and transactions, complaints and other requests, and any other matter that may prompt a reader to contact "the library." It is precisely because the Talking Book Program is operated through many different agencies that a system for coordination of consumer input is necessary if the goal of true utilization of consumer input in policy-making is to be reached.

Formal methods used for collecting and reviewing input from readers have been discussed elsewhere in this report. The present chapter will discuss methods from the standpoint of the flows of information involved, focusing primarily on unsolicited input since, as mentioned earlier, formal activities such as surveys and meetings usually incorporate review and analysis of information obtained.

The flow of consumer input information in the NLS/network system involves six basic possibilities:

1) from a reader to a network library, with an individual response;
2) from one or more readers to a network library, resulting in a general response about which all readers are informed;
3) from readers to NLS directly, with individual responses (which will usually involve the reader's local network library);
4) from a network library, based on reader input, to NLS, with a response to that library;

5) from a library to NLS based on reader input, but with general response about which all network libraries (and readers) are informed; and

6) from multiple libraries to NLS, with general response.

Many cases of each of these are well known to NLS and network library staffs. What is necessary to note, however, is not that they all occur, but that each occurs to an appropriate degree. That is, numerous consumer matters are handled by libraries and not passed on, either individually or by report on number of letters received, to other libraries or NLS. This makes it difficult for other agencies to have a clear sense of the day-to-day issues of concern to the library's readers, as well as those more urgent matters that are shared. It is necessary for this "baseline" information to be shared so that other libraries and NLS can have an objective means for noting when a shift in input is occurring. For example, the question of how libraries are handling learning-impaired applicants is a locally-specific one, that nevertheless can have national importance. An increase in input on eligibility matters could indicate the importance of this issue to current readers, and could inform NLS and the network libraries as to which parts of the country have most often experienced such a shift. Myriad other issues exist which can be used as examples, falling into many different possible subject areas.

Consumer input information handling generally involves separating routine transactions, common unsolicited input such as suggestions, requests for services which may or may not be available, and so forth, and identification of complaint or problem matters resolution of which requires non-routine action by the library. This screening process does not directly address the need for, or criteria for, reporting information to other network agencies. While urgent matters or those that clearly require it are communicated in a timely manner between libraries and NLS, general reports on the kinds of input being received are at present not made across units of the system in any formal or standardized way, so the information one unit has about the opinions of readers served by another unit may be quite subjective.

Network libraries do share results of reader surveys, and issues of their newsletters containing reports, consumer relations activities and consumer input, but these are neither shared with the entire network nor comparable enough to permit standardized tabulation of findings across libraries.

Logging and coding of consumer input, in a standardized manner, is therefore proposed as a solution to this information gap. While it may seem burdensome at first, especially in the face of no evidence that consumers" attitudes are not currently well known to network member agencies, the absence of such a system and the impracticality of sharing the actual input letters, findings etc. network-wide suggests that a method should be found to condense and distribute consumer attitude information systematically. A system would also reduce problems of subjective reporting, and permit, through the comparability of log entries, true responsiveness to expressed consumer input network wide.

III. LOGGING CONSUMER INPUT

As indicated in Chapter 4, Consumer Relations Activities for NLS Network Agencies, network libraries should adopt procedures for regularly logging consumer input received. This will permit the areas of interest to consumers at any point in time to be readily assessed. A set of subject classifications is thus proposed for use in keeping a log of general consumer input by topic. Adoption of these categories as standards network-wide will contribute substantially toward the ability to compile regional and national assessments of consumer input. It will also aid in making specific library-to-library comparisons, which may be of use to librarians in assessing the importance of input on a given topic.

InterAmerica performed a content analysis of responses to consumer input letters which were received at NLS between May, 1981 and May, 1982. The following content categories emerged as a result of this analysis. Explanations of each category heading are presented in the Appendix to this chapter.

Consumer Input Content Categories

Materials and Equipment Handling

- Ordering
- Labeling/Packaging
- Mailing
- Circulation

Book/Magazine Content

- Music
- Magazines/Periodicals
- Book Subject
- Media
- Catalog Search
- TBT/BBR

General and Other Services

- Eligibility/Assignment
- Transfer
- Quit Service
- Quality Assurance
- Narrator
- Equipment
- Proposed Future Services
- Other Services
- Other Content

Input was not equally distributed across these categories, due both to the predominance of certain issues in NLS consumer correspondence -- such as normal circulation requests to the Music Section and for international circulation to readers living abroad, two services performed directly from NLS, not the network libraries -- and also the fact that some subjects, while important in consumer relations, are not the focus of very many letters each year.

Based on this review, these 19 categories are proposed for use network-wide. While the proportion of responses that fall into each category may vary among network agencies, these headings do encompass all major aspects of the NLS/network systems operations which involve consumers. Additional categories might be added to the 19 here to encompass possible future areas of interest to the NLS/network agencies, such as responses to future "mini-surveys," in which readers are asked through network library reader newsletters to call in their opinions on particular, highly focused topics. In addition, some or all network agencies could identify sub-categories of the above topics for tracking input on more closely specified matters from time to time.

IV. NETWORK INPUT LOGGING AND FEEDBACK PROCEDURES

Putting a system for tracking consumer input into operation in network agencies requires several elements:

1) assignment of the task of weekly coding of input received;
2) in addition to responding to the input, reviewing the log monthly or quarterly to see if action is called for;
3) reporting the profile of input to readers via the newsletter, to staff, and to the Regional Conference Chairperson and to NLS; and
4) acting on and/or reporting to readers any feedback received from Regional librarians or NLS as the result of consumer input logs compilation and review.

The network library is the main contact point between the reader and the NLS/network system. If information received from readers is not shared in a meaningful manner within the network, the network cannot be fully responsive.

Accordingly, all network libraries should send their quarterly consumer input log tabulations to their Regional Conference Chairperson and to the Consumer Relations Section at NLS. Regionals having Subregionals should establish a periodic consumer input review process, utilizing the above steps, to assure continuous monitoring of consumer input response, through input tracking as well as meetings, surveys and the other more direct means libraries use. At biannual Regional and National meetings, similar consumer input reviews should be held, touching on every major consumer input method and consumer input information category, so that all present can be apprised of areas in which their consumer relations activities may or may not differ from others'. This process now occurs to an extent, but not comprehensively (touching on each category).

V. NLS INPUT TRACKING PROCEDURES

NLS similarly receives, logs, and responds to reader input, directly and through network agencies. Where response to consumer input requires involvement of more than one section of NLS, the Consumer Relations Section coordinates the response. When response to reader input concerns a particular network library, it is prepared jointly by the network Consultant responsible for that library and the Consumer Relations Section.

Other reader input may not be routinely assigned to the Consumer Relations Section for response, such as that concerning equipment problems or suggestions for new titles for the collection. Since the Consumer Relations Section has the responsibility for relations with consumers and awareness of consumer interests, it maintains the log of consumer input for NLS, and all sections corresponding with readers should keep it apprised via copies of letters and telephone service logs occasioned by input from readers.

The Consumer Relations Section will receive and tabulate the quarterly logs from network libraries and, combining these figures with logs on input received at NLS directly, will be able to present an overall profile of NLS/network consumer input received every quarter. NLS consumer input response includes review of current policies and procedures where indicated. In the future, periodic review of input logs can assist in this process, so that awareness of input in all areas (log categories), not just those triggering concern, is provided for on a regular basis. NLS responds to network agencies and readers through Network Bulletins and TBT/BBR, respectively. Reader input profiles could be shared with readers and network agencies through these same publications, thus establishing a formal feedback mechanism; procedural changes which may occur due to input can thus be highlighted.

In addition, a series of occasional notices to consumer organizations, or "Consumer Bulletins," similar in nature to Network Bulletins, could be used for dissemination of consumer related information from NLS to the consumer community.

VI. USING THE LOGS

The logging process is basic to a systematic approach for consumer input. With a logging and content category classification system in place throughout the network, its benefits can be utilized at the following levels:

- Individual library-consumer level;
- Interlibrary level; and
- Network-NLS level.

At the individual library level, the librarian (or designated staff member) logs the incoming reader correspondence in the appropriate content categories on a weekly basis. At the end of each month this information is tallied, and analyzed by comparing the profiled input with those of prior periods. Reviewed on a quarterly basis, the library staff will not only recognize recurring problems, but be able to identify patterns which are emerging, thereby identifying difficulties (and initiating responses) before they become major problem areas. In short, the responsiveness of the library staff to consumer needs is increased. The quality of service can be correspondingly improved where needed by regular, systematic review of input.

Shared on an interlibrary basis, this information aids in identifying areas of potential improved reader services across statewide or region-wide areas. Fluctuations in the numbers of letters received in particular categories per month as well as comparisons of the different input profiles that will inevitably be found across libraries, may be studied on a wider basis with conclusions shared between many libraries. Information gathered and exchanged within the network is more likely to bring about change where needed than if libraries were to singly approach the NLS with information on perceived difficulties with the system's services.

Finally, utilization of the proposed logging system by the network will provide an evaluation base from which policy reviews and changes by the NLS may later emerge, benefitting all agencies in the NLS/network system.

VII. SUMMARY

As a large, cooperative system, the NLS/network program can serve its readers best by implementing methods to capture, share, respond to and review input from its readers. To accomplish this, some form of system for regular communication of consumer input received among libraries and with NLS is necessary. A logging system network-wide is recommended, with periodic review and feedback to readers. Proposed standardized subject headings for such a logging system are presented, and the operation of such a system by libraries, between libraries, and between NLS and the network is discussed.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER VII

CONSUMER INPUT CONTENT ANALYSIS

NLS files on outgoing correspondence from May, 1981 to May, 1982 were reviewed in order to determine major categories of incoming correspondence from readers. Unless a clear indication existed in the NLS response that the incoming letter was from a reader, the letter was not included in the analysis. In logging letters, as many categories as were appropriate were checked.

The nineteen content categories used and defined for this study, which group into three basic divisions, were developed based on NLS operations and were refined during the early stages of the content analysis review process. The standardized use of these categories by NLS and network libraries/agencies will permit tabulation and comparative review of consumer input. Libraries are encouraged to utilize the following headings in logging incoming reader correspondence. A more thorough review of this content analysis effort will be provided in the following chapter.

MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT HANDLING

- Ordering
- Labeling/Packaging
- Mailing
- Circulation

BOOK/MAGAZINE CONTENT

- Music
- Magazines/Periodicals
- Book Subject
- Media
- Catalog Search
- TBT/BBR

GENERAL AND OTHER SERVICES

- Eligibility/Assignment to Regional Library
- Region Transfer
- Quit Service
- Quality Assurance
- Narrator
- Equipment
- Proposed Future Services
- Other Services
- Other Content.

The category with the most input was requests for specific book title searches or information on a particular author. These letters, logged in the Book Subject category, comprise one-fourth of the total reader correspondence. Additionally, the music category contains many items, owing to NLS' direct circulation of that collection (network libraries would have markedly less correspondence on music). Category descriptions for assignment of consumer input to categories are as follows:

A. MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT HANDLING

Ordering - This category can include equipment orders, magazine subscription requests, letters expressing satisfaction with the prompt service the reader received, and letters on difficulties encountered in obtaining materials ordered.

Labeling/Packaging - Letters received in this category include readers who have suggestions for labeling improvements on cassettes, or who had received damaged materials.

Mailing - Letters assigned to this category concern problems with the Postal Service delivering materials which had been damaged en route, not delivering materials on time, and/or not returning materials on loan. Readers may complain that post office boxes are too small to adequately hold ordered materials, sometimes resulting in damage to discs. Braille is a particular problem in this regard as it is very bulky.

Circulation - Corrspondence of this type addresses the availability of certain books or magazines through the library loan system. Problems which the readers report concern delays in receiving books on order. Some may feel this is the result of their order having been overlooked, others that delinquency in another's having returned the book or magazine in question was the source of the delay. Circulation as a category is usually paired with other categories as a result.

B. BOOK/MAGAZINE CONTENT

Music - As music circulates directly from NLS, correspondence in this category is substantial. Most letters request information on obtaining specific music scores in braille. Some readers are interested in purchasing the music scores which they had out on loan, others request works by a specific composer. Often readers request recorded music, not available from NLS.

Magazines/Periodicals - As magazines vary so widely in content yet are an important regular service of the program, all correspondence concerning them was grouped into a single category. Letters typically request additions to the current list of available periodicals in braille and on cassette. Other correspondence may consist of routine requests for subscriptions to magazines and periodicals, or information on whether or not a certain magazine is available in a specific media.

Book Subject - By far, the majority of letters received from readers falls into this category. Of these, most request information about specific authors or whether books of a generic type are available. Book subject correspondence ties in with Catalog Search to a large degree. Readers often suggest titles be added to the collection. Others express opinions about particular books in the collection.

Media - This category is for correspondence centered around requests for materials in a certain media, i.e. braille, cassette, disc, etc. Media often ties in with another category, usually Book Subject and Catalog Search, as they result in the Library's researching specific titles or general topics.

Catalog Search - This category is checked when readers request information on certain titles, topics, etc. (usually in a specified media). A search by the NLS is undertaken in order to respond.

TBT/BBR - Readers may specifically ask about receiving these publications or cite problems encountered in ordering due to improper use of or information in one of these publications.

C. GENERAL AND OTHER SERVICES

Eligibility/Assignment to Regional Library - Correspondence of this type would include requests for names of people to contact for service in other regions, or information on eligibility for the service. These letters often come from spouses, teachers, or friends of persons requesting the information.

Region Transfer - Letters of this type are received from individuals who move and need information on a new library, or are merely supplying the NLS with a change of address.

Quit Service - Letters of this type deal with cancellation of service due to death or regained health/sight.

Quality Assurance - Letters under this category include problems with unclear recordings, skipping discs, equipment design problems, and poor paper quality of products in braille, among others.

Narrator - Letters in this category may comment on preference for a certain narrator, or express satisfaction/dissatisfaction with a particular narrator's voice or delivery.

Equipment - Readers may write in to express satisfaction with the equipment; others may experience difficulties with their equipment or write in to inquire about new models of equipment. New equipment queries should also be logged under Future Services.

Proposed Future Services - Letters concerning an increase in the number of periodicals and book titles available are noted here, as well as letters on forthcoming equipment.

Other Services - Letters which did not come under the above given categories concerning services were logged under this heading.

Other Content - This category is similar to the preceding one.

Results of NLS Correspondence File Content Analysis

As indicated earlier, the above categories were developed and refined through an actual review of NLS correspondence. (While telephone records were not reviewed, and may well have differred in nature from written correspondence, the findings here cover the full range of consumer-related topics.) The results of the analysis were as follows:

May 1981 - May 1982 NLS
Consumer Correspondence Content Analysis

Category / Month:	May 81	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 82	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Total	%
Ordering	1	2	2	1	1	-	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	11	2
Labeling	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	3	9	2
Mailing	-	4	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	2	-	2	11	2
Circulation	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	4	9	2
Music	1	2	7	1	2	2	2	-	1	2	16	10	6	52	10
Magazines/Pdcls.	1	2	1	1	2	-	4	1	4	-	15	1	2	34	7
Book Subject	11	10	7	23	10	8	9	5	4	4	18	4	12	125	25
Media	9	8	2	4	4	3	3	2	5	5	8	5	5	63	13
Catalog Search	5	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	5	8	6	7	60	12
TBT/BBR	2	2	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	12	2
Eligibility/Assgmt.	3	1	2	2	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	11	2
Transfer	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	4	1
Quit Service	-	-	3	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	1
Quality Assurance	3	5	1	1	1	-	6	-	3	2	2	3	1	28	6
Narrator	-	4	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	1	11	2
Equipment	4	2	3	-	1	4	-	-	1	-	4	-	2	21	4
Future Services	1	-	-	6	3	-	3	-	2	-	1	-	2	18	4
Other Services	1	-	4	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	7	1
Other Content	3	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	7	1
Totals	46	47	40	49	30	27	34	15	25	19	85	30	50	497	100

These results, and what they indicate, are the basis for the following observations:

-- The number of categories must be great enough to permit ready specification of which category a given letter goes under; however there will as a result be many categories with few entries.

-- Given the consumer-oriented purpose of this task, librarians may wish to collapse some categories that concern the ongoing functions of the library (music, book subject) and add subcategories to others. Advisory committees (local/national) should be added as a category by all users.

-- In this effort, more than one category could be ticked for a single letter. Thus a letter about the unavailability of an old title on hard disc might be coded under media and book subject and catalog search. A far greater number of categories would be needed to eliminate this multiple coding, however. This is the primary reason why the book subject category has such a high proportion of entries.

-- In coding reader input, librarians may wish to use plus and minus signs to denote complimentary versus negative letters, for later tabulation singly as well as combined.

-- Librarians are reminded that while comparability across libraries is the reason for adoption of a standardized set of headings, the particular issue areas of importance within those categories may be tracked locally by the addition of subcategories. Thus, if a library was considering adding a regional magazine to its locally-produced collection and it announced in its newsletter that readers were invited to call in their preferences, subcategories for the leading candidates could be added to the Magazines/Periodicals category for a time, along perhaps with one for those not wanting such production, and other correspondence falling under this category captured under a temporary subheading Other.

-- New categories can be added later, network-wide, as areas become important. For example, voice indexing, currently in the pilot stage, could be listed separately; it was here logged under Other Services. Only two letters concerning it were received by NLS in the 13-month review period.

-- Libraries may have less or more correspondence (other than routine book orders) with readers than this NLS data represents. They may as a result wish to code it quarterly rather than monthly. However, it can be seen from this data that peaks can occur over as brief a period as a month -- note Magazines in March. It is primarily for this purpose -- tracking changes in individual categories over time, rather than inter-category comparison -- that this log is designed to permit. Thus, quarterly logs may mask rapid changes, lessening the value of the process.

Chapter VIII - Conclusions and Recommendations

This volume has presented a review of the many consumer relations activities which occur at NLS and the network Regional and Subregional libraries. It has placed these activities into a framework designed to demonstrate that, although many of the same kinds of activities occur at all of the agencies in the NLS/network library system, they vary in degree and style according to local conditions. This has been done to acknowledge the varied nature of the network, and to point out as well potential methods for utilizing the consumer information so obtained for the purposes of the system as a whole.

As this Plan is reviewed by network agencies, it should form the basis for a dynamic, more explicitly formalized system of interlibrary communication on the subject of consumer relations activities. This process should involve national and local consumer organizations, Regional conferences, and national NLS/network conferences. At the conclusion of this process, a communications system should be in place which all staff will understand and utilize.

The chapters in this report have been arranged to take the reader from a review of present activities, through a discussion of responsibility for conducting consumer relations activities, to a series of increasingly detailed suggested mechanisms for carrying out these activities. The NLS/network system clearly operates many vehicles for soliciting and receiving consumer input, and has done so throughout its history. However, coordination and compilation of this input into useable form in policymaking has been absent, at least in any observable systematic way.

The logging and tabulating method in Chapter VII would overcome this barrier to the efficient use of this information. As it entails a somewhat major alteration from present network operations, it could perhaps be tested first on a pilot basis in only one region. This "Content Analysis" recommendation is the lead finding of this report. Recommendations made to NLS by InterAmerica, including this and other points as well, are as follows:

1. The Consumer Relations Section should be supported and its consumer relations functions expanded, and integration between its consumer relations functions and those of all other sections at NLS should be increased.

2. Correspondence with network libraries necessitated by reader input, often called for in addition to direct responses to the reader, should be jointly prepared by the network consultant responsible for that library and the Consumer Relations Section.

3. The Consumer Relations Section should conduct regular administrative meetings attended by heads of all sections at NLS on consumer related issues.

4. All sections at NLS should routinely route copies of reader input received, and section responses, to the Consumer Relations Section for tabulation. Briefings on the aggregate types of input received will be given at the consumer relations meetings.

5. The Head of the Consumer Relations Section should meet individually with the the heads of all other sections at NLS regularly or as needed to review consumer relations issues and procedures.

6. The network Consultant function should be expanded to include routine communication with the Consumer Relations Section of all consumer-related matters discussed between consultants and their assigned libraries on an ongoing basis, as part of their designated field monitoring functions. These reviews should cover the consumer relations items from the library checklist used on site visits.

7. NLS should adopt an additional method of communicating consumer-related matters on a rapid, ad hoc basis to consumer organizations as well as the network via a series of occasional notices which could be called "Consumer Bulletins." These could be sent to consumer organizations, network agencies, and key figures in the consumer community for the purpose of broad, rapid notification of these publics on matters of timely import concerning the NLS' patrons.

8. The Consumer Relations Section should publish periodic handbooks for use by network agencies on various aspects of consumer relations activities implementation, and/or consumer issues discussion and training activities.

9. Regional and Subregional libraries should provide periodic, structured training and discussion sessions for staff who interact regularly with readers, to assure optimum use of opportunities for obtaining consumer input.

10. Regional and Subregional libraries should maintain logs of consumer input received, according to broad categories standard across the network. These logs should be compiled regularly and transmitted to NLS for periodic tabulation, so that a regular, network-wide system for monitoring consumer input can be available to policy-makers.

11. Network libraries should periodically conduct reader surveys, ranging from "mini-surveys" of readers calling in to place book orders to large scale, mailout surveys on a variety of topics, conducted according to accepted statistical techniques.

12. Network libraries should regularly obtain input from consumers through meetings, either of standing consumer advisory committees, with rotating memberships and bylaws, or through "open forum" meetings, announced well in advance and preferably held at various locations around the library's service area.